

# Best practice supervision guidelines

Family violence,  
sexual assault  
and child wellbeing





We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Victoria and pay respects to their Elders past and present. We acknowledge that Aboriginal self-determination is a human right and recognise the hard work of many generations of Aboriginal people.

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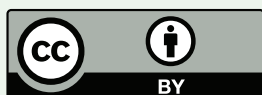
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# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>5</b>
Acknowledgement of Country	5
Acknowledgement of people with lived experience of family violence	5
Partners	5
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
Why we need the guidelines	6
About the guidelines	8
Audience for the guidelines	9
<b>Definitions</b>	<b>10</b>
Supervision	10
Managerial or line management supervision	11
Clinical supervision	11
Cultural empowerment	12
Intersectional feminist supervision	14
Link with other supports	15
<b>Supervision models</b>	<b>16</b>
Four functions of supervision	16
<b>Types of supervision</b>	<b>19</b>
Scheduled or formal supervision	19
Unscheduled or informal supervision	19
Live supervision	19
Group supervision and peer supervision	19
Collaborative supervision	20
<b>Role of the organisation, supervisor, and supervisee</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Principles underpinning best practice supervision</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Frameworks that inform supervision</b>	<b>30</b>
Trauma-informed framework	30
Trauma- and violence-informed framework	31
Attachment-based framework	32
Strengths-based framework	33

<b>Reflective supervision</b>	<b>34</b>
Why is reflective supervision so important?	34
What is reflection?	35
Questions that accompany the learning cycle processes	36
Four levels of reflection	37
Reflexivity	38
Reflection readiness	38
Safety	39
<b>Support and development of supervisors</b>	<b>40</b>
Critical role of supervisors	40
Transitioning to supervisor	40
Developing supervisors	41
<b>Understanding and sustaining the workforce</b>	<b>42</b>
Zone of fabulousness	42
Supporting a 'just' culture	43
How to support practitioners through supervision	43
<b>Lived experience in the workforce</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>When supervision becomes tricky: relationship difficulties</b>	<b>48</b>
Setting up for success	48
Why conflict arises	49
Responding to conflict	50
When performance concerns arise	50
<b>Supervision standards</b>	<b>52</b>
Supervision frequency and duration	52
Supervisor to supervisee ratio	53
Supervisor training and capability	53
Supervision notes	54
<b>Further reading</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Glossary</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Appendix</b>	<b>58</b>
Scheduled or one-on-one supervision agreement example	59
Peer or group supervision agreement example	60
Supervisee wellbeing plan example	61
Team care plan example	63
Tip sheet – Inviting feedback from supervisees	65
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>66</b>

# Acknowledgements

## Acknowledgement of Country

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We acknowledge and respect that Aboriginal communities are steeped in traditions and customs built on a disciplined social and cultural order that has sustained 60,000 years of existence. We acknowledge the significant disruptions to social and cultural order and the ongoing hurt caused by colonisation.

We acknowledge the ongoing leadership role of Aboriginal communities, particularly Aboriginal women, in addressing and preventing family violence and will continue to work in collaboration with First Peoples to eliminate family violence from all communities.

## Acknowledgement of people with lived experience of family violence

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing acknowledges adults, children and young people who have experienced family or sexual violence, including within our workforce. We recognise the vital importance of family violence system and service reforms being informed by their experiences, expertise and advocacy.

These guidelines are informed by insights from people with lived experience of family violence, including representatives of the Victim Survivors' Advisory Council (VSAC). We are particularly grateful for their assistance ensuring the guidelines reflect the perspectives of practitioners with lived experience of family violence.

## Partners

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing acknowledges the expertise and knowledge of those organisations who have contributed to this document including:

- Safe and Equal and its member organisations
- No to Violence and its member organisations
- Sexual Assault Services Victoria and its member organisations
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare and its member organisations
- Victim Survivors' Advisory Council members
- Family Violence Principal Strategic Advisors
- Family Safety Victoria and broader departmental staff.

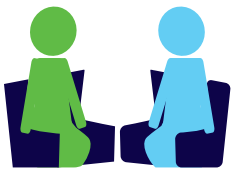
We are grateful for the significant contribution of expertise and knowledge from Daphne Yarram, Chief Executive Officer of Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service, and her team to these guidelines. We acknowledge that the department is not the custodian of this knowledge. Where people are seeking to reproduce information in these guidelines related to First Nations peoples, they should engage with their local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure it is culturally safe for their organisational context and location.



# Introduction

**These guidelines present best practice guidance and examples to help the family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing sectors (the sectors) provide regular and effective supervision for their workforces. They set out the level and quality of supervision future graduates and career changers can expect.**

They also aim to support the wellbeing and sustainability of the current workforce. This will help to improve attraction, recruitment and retention in the sectors.



**Supervision is a priority, not a luxury.**

— Hewson and Carrol, 2016<sup>1</sup>

## Why we need the guidelines

Supervision is central to developing and sustaining the sector's workforces. It allows the exploration of:

- roles and responsibilities of sector practitioners, including risk assessment, therapeutic support, engagement, safety planning and collaborative multi-agency responses to family violence
- roles and responsibilities of supervisors
- adult, child and young person victim survivors' experience and narrative
- how to work in a nuanced way with young people who can be both victim survivors of and display family and sexual violence
- respecting victim survivors as experts of their own lives and valuing their assessments of their own safety and needs
- how to practise safe, non-collusive communication with perpetrators
- anti-collusive practices which invite personal accountability for perpetrators' use of family violence and sexual violence, and their related failure to protect children by using violence
- gendered drivers of family violence such as the beliefs, attitudes and social norms about gender that can lead to condoning of violence against women and rigid gender stereotyping
- both perceived and real risks to supervisee safety, including fears practitioners have working directly with perpetrators<sup>2</sup> or providing after-hours outreach services
- applying an intersectional lens and understanding supervisee/supervisor biases, including how people from First Nations, LGBTIQ+, culturally diverse communities or at-risk age groups may experience barriers, discrimination and inequality
- providing practitioners with lived experience of family violence and sexual assault with practice support and encouragement to practise self-care
- providing First Nations practitioners with support to carry the cultural load
- how to embed cultural safety, in line with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety framework<sup>3</sup>

- how a supervisee's family of origin<sup>4</sup> or creation may affect their client assessments and interactions
- how to be more strengths-based and collaborative with clients, colleagues and other professionals
- individual practitioner and organisational power, and structural and systemic privilege and oppressions across the sector<sup>5</sup>
- the multi-faceted nature of supervision, including reflection, case discussions, support, professional development, clinical and managerial functions.

Supervision supports practitioners to enhance risk assessment, therapeutic support, engagement and safety planning. It also supports supervisors to enhance their leadership skills, understanding of workforce dynamics and needs and the provision of reflective supervision.

The sector has a highly skilled, dedicated, and resilient workforce, who, for decades, have embraced the importance of supervision and reflective practice (active process of witnessing an experience, examining it, and learning from it). The prevalence and severity of family violence have escalated. This, combined with the prescribed responsibilities under the Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) Framework, including a greater focus on collaborative practice and intersectionality, means providing effective supervision has never been more crucial.

**'Paying attention to improving supervision quality can have far-reaching effects and be one of the most cost-effective ways of turning around an organisation.'**

— Wonnacott, 2012<sup>6</sup>

The guidelines do not set out to change what is already working within the sector, but will:

- provide an opportunity for programs and organisations to review their supervision policies and practices and consider sector thinking and what other programs have found useful
- apply to family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing sectors, acknowledging that these workforces have different skill sets and role requirements
- set the foundation for achieving more uniform, standard definitions, models, principles and practices of supervision across the state
- explore complex concepts and theories in terms of how they relate to supervision and provide further reading if the sector wants to delve deeper
- support the commitment government made in the Dhelk Dja Partnership Agreement of ensuring self-determined, strengths-based, trauma-informed, and culturally safe practices are built into policies and practice, and the broader family violence service system and its workforce
- signal to potential graduates and career changers entering the sector that their learning, support and wellbeing needs will be taken seriously
- support a culture of learning and professional growth
- invigorate conversations about best practice and some of the tensions and challenges inherent in providing regular and effective supervision.



## About the guidelines

The guidelines include:

- definitions of supervision, including clinical and managerial supervision
- the functions of supervision and how they fit with reflection
- information about reflective supervision and the values and theories underpinning supervision
- guidance on the role of supervisees, supervisors and organisations
- best practice standards regarding supervision frequency, duration, supervisor to supervisee ratio, supervisor training and supervision notes
- recommended reading for supervisors and supervisees who would like to know more about supervision
- examples of supervision agreement and care plans which can be used or adapted by the sector.

The standards were developed with the sector and while adhering to these standards is not mandatory, they are recommended as best practice.

The guidelines complement:

- existing supervision policies and procedures within the sector
- existing supervision professional development and training
- recruitment and induction procedures and processes, noting the importance of including interview questions exploring the applicant's commitment to providing and/ or receiving supervision
- peak body practice standards, including Safe and Equal's *Code of practice: principles and standards for specialist family violence services for victim-survivors*, the CASA Forum *Standards of practice 2014*, and the *Men's behaviour change minimum standards 2018*

- the *MARAM practice guides: guidance for professionals working with adults using family violence*
- the shift to *mandatory minimum qualifications for specialist family violence practitioners*
- the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) *Supervision standards 2014* and AASW *Practice standards 2023*
- Australian Community Workers Association *Ethics and standards*
- graduate programs which include a focus on supervision
- the *Family violence experts by experience framework*, which noted that a significant number of family violence practitioners have experienced family violence and further discussions about how to value and harness the strengths and insights of the workforce's lived experience was required
- a culture reinforcing the health, safety and wellbeing of workforces and the online *Family violence, prevention and sexual assault health, safety and wellbeing guide* and *Safe and Equal's Self-assessment tool*
- the *Family violence capability frameworks* for prevention and response
- access to debriefing and Employee Assistance Programs (EAP)
- collective advocacy to help transform unfair systems and practices, which plays a role in supporting workforce sustainability and retention
- other key workforce projects, research into workforce development and broader community services workforce development initiatives.





## Audience for the guidelines

The guidelines are for students on placement, volunteers, administration staff, practitioners, team leaders, coordinators, managers, supervisors in private practice and management of the Victorian family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing sectors.

This includes:

- The Orange Door
- specialist family violence services
- specialist sexual assault services
- services that operate after hours
- child and family services.

The guidelines recognise that supervisors and supervisees come from various backgrounds and professional disciplines. They can be adapted to suit different contexts. Using the guidelines is just one strategy to strengthen supervision – and most programs and agencies already have effective supervision policies and practices in place.

Although the guidelines have not been written specifically for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs), ACCOs may still find them useful. Similarly, this information may be helpful for the broader community services sector.

The information applies to:

- one-to-one supervision
- group or peer supervision sessions
- policy development
- supervision training.

# Definitions

**Defining supervision within the sector is complex. It is difficult to capture the intricate balance required to develop and maintain trusting professional relationships.**

Ideally, supervision offers supervisees authenticity by talking openly about emotional responses to processing stories of family violence and sexual harm.

Supervision is essential for all practitioners working with trauma and interpersonal violence and those who:

- invite engagement and directly (or indirectly) work with adults using family and sexual violence, while applying non-collusive practice
- work with children and young people exhibiting concerning or harmful sexual behaviours or family violence, while applying a trauma- and violence-informed lens
- often work with unpredictable and serious levels of risk related to adults, children and young people experiencing violence
- may feel responsible to stop violence or abuse and to get justice for clients, especially for practitioners with lived experience of family or sexual violence.

Supervisors have a complex role. They must balance supporting supervisees, client needs and ethical practice. Supervision creates opportunities to discuss these tensions, and to support and sustain practitioners in their challenging, complex work.

## Supervision

**Supervision is an interactive, collaborative, ongoing, caring and respectful professional relationship and reflective process. It focuses on the supervisee's practice and wellbeing.**

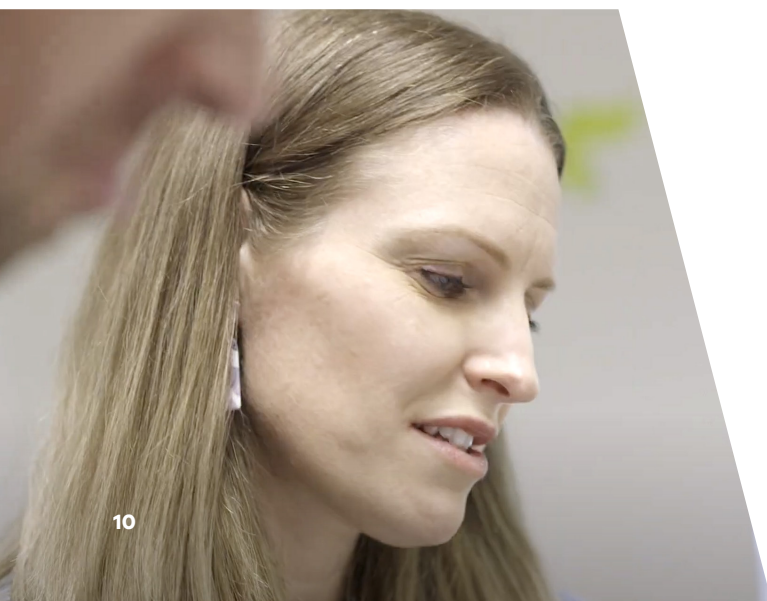
The objectives are to improve, develop, support and provide safety for practitioners and their practice.<sup>7</sup> It is ideally strengths-based and supervisee-led, where the supervisor adapts to supervisees' preferences.

The sector expects supervision to incorporate an intersectional feminist lens. This allows discussion about power differences within the supervisory relationship, practice with clients and the broader system. It helps promote justice-doing, advocacy and community activism on behalf of clients and workforces.

Supervision enables monitoring of supervisee wellbeing and providing tailored support. Using a trauma- and violence-informed approach allows supervisors to normalise practitioner reactions to working within an imperfect system and working with people experiencing trauma and significant life events. The emotional toll of the work and vicarious trauma can be acknowledged during supervision in an empathic, understanding way, rather than blaming or pathologising.

Supervision supports a collaborative approach with clients, especially when setting goals, developing care plans and reviewing therapeutic objectives. It also provides a forum to:

- consider the unique professional development needs and preferences of each supervisee
- adopt a variety of supervisory styles (teaching, mentoring, coaching)
- consider child-centred approaches alongside the application of an intersectional feminist lens
- reflect on interpersonal boundaries,<sup>8</sup> essential in family violence and sexual violence work.



## **‘Supervision is vital to recognising and valuing the skills and capacity of practitioners.’**

— Jess Cadwallader,  
Principal Strategic Advisor, Central Highlands

The sector often refers to managerial or line management and clinical supervision. The above definition aligns to both, and they are defined in more detail below.

### **Managerial or line management supervision**

**This supports organisational requirements and processes for practitioners to do their jobs and achieve positive outcomes for victim survivors.**

Usually supervisor-led, this type of supervision is more task-focused and less reflective. When it includes reflection, it is usually for technical and practical aspects rather than deeper critical or process levels.<sup>9</sup> Managerial supervision helps align practices with organisation policies and relevant legislation. It includes discussing future career pathways and learning opportunities, both formal and informal.

### **Clinical supervision**

**Clinical supervision aims to develop a supervisee’s clinical awareness and skills to recognise and manage:**

- personal responses
- value clashes
- power imbalances
- ethical dilemmas.<sup>10</sup>

Usually supervisee-led, this type of supervision allows deeper insight to the work using process reflection.<sup>11</sup> This is where conscious and unconscious aspects of practice and supervisory relationships are explored.

A clinical supervisor can be from outside of the organisation or be an internal line management supervisor or a supervisor who does not have line management responsibilities.

Having distinct roles for clinical and managerial supervision can help ensure critical and process reflection occurs.

## **‘Supervision is their time, it’s not my time.’**

— Ivy Yarram, Yoowinna Wurnalung  
Aboriginal Healing Service

## Cultural empowerment

**Cultural empowerment<sup>12</sup> is a reflective, holistic, validating, non-judgemental, two-way learning process provided by a supervisor who is skilled, experienced, caring, respectful and knowledgeable about their local First Nations community.<sup>13</sup>**

The relationship should empower supervisees by reducing barriers for First Nations supervisees to perform their duties in a culturally safe environment.

First Nations workforces in Victoria need culturally safe empowerment.<sup>14</sup> It provides cultural context when reflecting on practice. It incorporates a strengths-based and person-centred approach that acknowledges a supervisee's sense of pride and purpose in being able to impart cultural knowledge to others. It is recommended for First Nations supervisees and non-Aboriginal supervisees who work with First Nations people and communities.

To be effective, supervisors and colleagues need to understand why culturally safe empowerment is important. This requires awareness and understanding of the history and subsequent issues and challenges for First Nations supervisees. Such challenges include working closely with their own community and carrying the 'cultural load'.

**12 Note:** The word supervision can have negative connotations of control and regulation for the First Nations workforce.

## Cultural load

Cultural load<sup>15</sup> refers to multiple elements of stress, pressure and obligation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners can experience in their professional roles. These pressures are outside the normal boundaries and expectations of other professionals working in community services. Cultural load can include:

- the often-unrecognised expectation to provide Indigenous knowledge, education and support to non-Aboriginal practitioners
- cultural obligations to client family members within community that involve support outside normal hours
- experiencing racism or cultural ignorance or assumptions in the workplace that need to be addressed and which take an emotional toll
- dealing with intergenerational trauma and lateral violence within community.

There are different elements of cultural load. In workplaces, these include the following:

- Employers may knowingly or unknowingly expect First Nations practitioners to provide Indigenous knowledge, education and support to other practitioners. This often occurs without any formal reduction or alteration of their other work.
- First Nations practitioners often live in the communities they work with. These community relationships can affect practitioner–client relationships and practice. In particular, it can often mean First Nations practitioners need to meet cultural obligations to client family members outside of work hours, which requires energy and time.
- First Nations practitioners who work on lands where they are not a Traditional Owner have different obligations to that community. These derive from a complex 'adopted relationship'. This can involve being guided by Traditional Owners and Elders to fulfil cultural responsibilities that lie outside a professional work context.

**15 Note:** Although cultural load in this section refers to First Nations people, members of other culturally and racially marginalised communities may also experience an additional 'load' in the workplace.



- Being the only First Nations practitioner in an organisation can be particularly difficult and isolating in the context of carrying the cultural load alone. There is often a sense of responsibility to accurately represent the community. It can also sometimes involve having to experience and deal with either racist or unintentional cultural ignorance or cultural assumptions by team members.
- The overlay of transgenerational trauma, complex community relationships and lateral violence which adds to the 'load'.

First Nations practitioners want and need to have their cultural load recognised and respected as an important aspect of their role. They also need culturally safe space during supervision to reflect on this role and its impact on them, including the conflicts and challenges.

## Supporting cultural empowerment

Supervisors and colleagues should have appropriate cultural awareness training to be aware of their roles and responsibilities when working alongside First Nations supervisees. Non-Aboriginal services need to also recognise that some aspects of cultural empowerment and connection can only be gained and shared between First Nations people. Cultural meaning and practices will be different from non-Aboriginal norms and belief systems.<sup>16</sup>

The Yarn Up Time and the CASE model<sup>17</sup> offer guidance on how to provide culturally responsive supervision for First Nations practitioners and non-Aboriginal practitioners working with First Nations communities.



## Intersectional feminist supervision

**This recognises how different aspects of a person's identity might affect how they experience the world and the related barriers.<sup>18</sup>**

An intersectional feminist lens encourages supervisors and supervisees to question their own experiences and how they might create assumptions about another's experience. It assists supervisees to:

- better understand how different forms of marginalisation impact others
- reflect on own lived experience of power, privilege and oppression and the impacts on work with clients and other professionals<sup>19</sup>
- consider the system more broadly
- be more targeted in their advocacy for improving gender and broader equality.

It also helps practitioners appreciate the need for personalised and tailored solutions.

The message that 'personal is political'<sup>20</sup> is critical, as is the role of the supervisor to create this awareness for the supervisee. Supervisors can use supervision to examine the effect of hierarchies and the power differential between the supervisor and supervisee. It is crucial for supervisors to critically reflect on their own position of power and avoid taking a paternalistic approach to supervision. The aim is to create a more empowering and egalitarian relationship.<sup>21</sup> The notion that the 'personal is professional' and bringing your whole self to work can also be considered a feminist act.<sup>22</sup>

**'Checking your privilege isn't about creating a sliding scale of who's worse off – it's about learning and understanding the views of other feminists and remembering that we're all in this together. True equality leaves no-one behind.'**

— *International Women's Development Agency*<sup>23</sup>

## Cultural responsiveness and inclusion

It is important to provide supervision that is culturally responsive and inclusive. This means:

- respecting cultural identity and beliefs
- recognising and supporting cultural strengths as part of supervision
- valuing diversity
- understanding the intersecting aspects of a person's identity
- adopting an empowering rather than paternalistic approach
- providing a space that is trauma- and violence-informed, strengths-based and person-centred<sup>24</sup>
- considering individual needs, for example, ensuring that supervision is accessible for a person with a disability
- exploring responses to client identities, challenging assumptions and considering how these identities can offer strength, connection and resistance, in addition to exploring their experiences of discrimination.

## Link with other supports

**Although they overlap, supervision is different to formal debriefing, critical incident management and day-to-day management interactions. These need their own policies and procedures.**

Performance management is also separate to supervision but, through early recognition and support, supervision can prevent performance concerns growing.

Supervisors need to use empathy and counselling skills during supervision. How much will depend on the situation and supervisee. The line between supervision and counselling is fluid. It reflects supervisees bringing their 'whole selves' to the work. Personal experiences can support the work. Deep reflection during supervision provides opportunities to:

- unpack personal experiences that affect practice and vice versa
- allow supervisees to feel supported and maybe seek ongoing external help if required, through EAP or therapy
- monitor the safety and wellbeing of supervisees, their levels of vicarious trauma and possible burnout<sup>25</sup>

Develop a supervision agreement early in the relationship. This is an opportunity to discuss the fluid nature of supervision and normalise the potential need for EAP or a therapeutic response.

**'One of our practitioners wasn't sure why a particular client triggered her. We were able to talk it through in the moment and when we unpacked it, it went right back to her early years. Providing space for in-the-moment supervision meant that she was able to make that link. I then referred her to the EAP, so she had the opportunity to explore it further through ongoing therapeutic work with someone else.'**

— Kelly Gannon, Team Leader,  
Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation



# Supervision models

**There are many supervision models, such as the PASE<sup>26</sup>, 7-eyed<sup>27</sup> and 4x4x4<sup>28</sup> models.**

The 4x4x4 integrated model of supervision is used in many Victorian sectors, including child protection. It includes the three functions outlined in the *AASW Supervision standards 2014*.<sup>29</sup>

The 4x4x4 model helps to promote reflective supervision and locate it within the context within which supervision occurs by including:

- the four functions of supervision (support, management, development and mediative)
- the Kolb learning cycle (experience, reflection, analysis, plan and act) that underpins reflective practice<sup>30</sup>
- the context in which supervision occurs or stakeholders.

The supervision functions provide the 'what' of supervision. The stakeholders are the 'who' or 'why' in supervision. The reflective learning cycle is the 'how', or the glue that holds the model together. It ensures supervision is a developmental process which improves supervisee practice and decisions, as well as their insight about themselves and their work.

## Four functions of supervision

**Supervision serves several functions. These overlap and occur to varying degrees depending on the context, supervisory relationship and organisation. A clear separation of the functions is never entirely possible, or desirable.**

It can be difficult for supervisors to cover all four functions. Sector feedback and related literature show that there is often a lack of balance across the functions, with managerial supervision prioritised. Partly for this reason, some programs have separated clinical (supportive, developmental and systemic functions) from line management (managerial function) supervision. They have also provided peer supervision to ensure the more reflective functions occur.

The four functions of supervision are outlined in more detail on the next page. Note that the sector prefers the term 'systemic' over 'mediative'.





## 1 Supportive

- provides a forum to discuss confidentiality, develop trust and a supervisory alliance between supervisor and supervisee
- creates a safe context for supervisees to talk about the successes, rewards, challenges, conflicts, uncertainties, and emotional impacts (including vicarious trauma) of the work and to monitor supervisee safety and wellbeing
- provides an opportunity to explore vicarious resilience which can have significant and positive impacts on practitioner wellbeing and satisfaction since it identifies client strengths and signs of progress<sup>31</sup>
- explores supervisee's own personal experiences (including current and previous trauma and lived experience), assumptions, beliefs, and values and how these can impact, and be used, in client practice and interactions with colleagues<sup>32</sup>
- explores the supervisee's own experience of being parented, or of parenting their children, and how this might be influencing their judgements and practice when working with parents, caregivers, children, and young people
- works from the premise, and is sensitive to the reality, that many practitioners will have their own lived experience of family violence and sexual assault and the decision to disclose is a personal one<sup>33</sup>
- provides a space to recognise the impact of the work and identify when external supports may be needed such as EAP, clinical supervision or a therapeutic response
- helps maintain professional boundaries which are critical in sustaining the workforce
- engages the supervisee and supervisor in discussions about trauma- and violence-informed theory and practices, organisational culture and creating psychological safety
- recognises the potentially distressing and stressful nature of the work
- gives practitioners a restorative space to explore the impact of the work on their mental health, identity and work-life balance
- allows discussion about team wellbeing and how collective care can be enhanced.

## 2 Managerial

- promotes competent, professional and accountable practice
- checks supervisee understanding and compliance with policies, procedures and legislated requirements
- monitors workloads, hybrid working arrangements and work-life balance
- checks that the supervisee has the information and resources they need
- helps supervisees understand their role and responsibilities
- reflects on interpersonal boundaries and the work
- includes human resource tasks, such as leave requests.

### 3 Developmental

- establishes a collaborative and reflective approach for lifelong learning
- focuses on professional development
- supports those working to meet mandatory minimum qualification requirements
- helps embed the MARAM Framework and best interests case practice model for vulnerable children and young people into practice
- clarifies individual learning styles, preferences and factors affecting learning
- explores supervisee knowledge, ethics and values
- enables two-way constructive feedback and learning between supervisor and supervisee
- allows feedforward, which focuses on future behaviour and can be better received than feedback
- allows supervisors to coach more experienced practitioners via curious, reflective questions
- helps determine and support supervisee professional development or training needs.

### 4 Systemic

- explores power structures and inequalities in the work context and the supervisory relationship
- supports discussions about intersectional feminist theory, how intersectionality is contextual and dynamic, and requires ongoing reflection and analysis of power dynamics
- explores the relational power imbalances and lack of agency experienced by children and young people
- ensures culturally safe and informed supervision is available to First Nations practitioners, which recognises the extra layer of vicarious trauma that First Nations practitioners are exposed to and the cultural load they carry
- recognises that there is systemic discrimination and racism that is part of the cultural load an Aboriginal practitioner must carry in their work
- helps supervisees make sense of, relate to and navigate the broader system, sector changes and system limitations
- helps improve multi-agency collaboration
- provides a forum to consult about policies and organisational change
- provides important upward feedback about the frontline experience and interface with the system
- offers a forum to plan advocacy work on a systemic level.

# Types of supervision

## Scheduled or formal supervision

**This type of supervision is regular, planned, one-to-one, uninterrupted and held in a private setting between the supervisor and supervisee.**

It provides the consistency and predictability needed to promote a positive relationship between supervisor and supervisee. This type of supervision must be prioritised over other forms of supervision to enhance workforce sustainability and service quality. It is often regarded the 'heart of the process'<sup>34</sup> and is the most effective type of supervision for retaining practitioners.<sup>35</sup>

## Unscheduled or informal supervision

**Unscheduled or informal supervision includes consultations on case decision making, delegation, staff and case load management, professional development, meeting support needs, service and resource allocation and policy clarification.**

The nature of family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing practice means that many complex issues cannot wait until a scheduled supervision session. Unscheduled supervision capitalises on learning opportunities which risk being missed if the supervisee waits until scheduled supervision.

Risks in prioritising unscheduled supervision include:

- it does not provide the supervisee with privacy and a space to talk about the work's impact on themselves
- due to its time-pressured nature, it rarely provides opportunities for proper reflection
- it can be challenging to ensure decisions and rationales are properly documented.

## Live supervision

**Live supervision involves direct supervision of case practice provided by a more senior practitioner observing the supervisee in practice or accompanying the supervisee while engaging with children, families or other professionals.**

This may include the more senior practitioner role-modelling, mentoring, coaching and promoting self-reflection. Live supervision can provide a more complete picture of the supervisee's strengths and skills. It has the advantage of providing real-time feedback or feedforward, thereby increasing self-awareness, and improving clinical skills.

Live supervision can take different forms such as:

- supervisor and supervisee co-working on cases
- observing the supervisee in practice and the supervisor intervening only when helpful
- practice recordings for later exploration and reflection, noting that permission would be required from clients and supervisees.

Live supervision can be a highly useful learning experience for the supervisee if done well, but also risks being a disempowering experience if done less well. Once again, the relationship quality and trust between the supervisor and supervisee will be crucial.

Live supervision can also be beneficial for clients, who benefit from having input from two practitioners.

## Group supervision and peer supervision

**Group supervision is normally provided within an established team of practitioners. It comprises structured sessions, often involving case presentations that include a genogram of the family to assist discussions.**

The practitioner may reflect on their experience in working with a client or family and seek the assistance from the group around a particular aspect of their work.

Group supervision needs to involve the supervisor responsible for work standards and document any decisions arising from the discussions.

Peer supervision often has broader membership than a practitioner's immediate team. It does not involve supervisors and is therefore not a decision-making forum. It offers peer learning, reflection and a support opportunity for cases, responses and practice. Supervisees can then further reflect on these discussions during individual supervision. Peer supervision may be self-led by the group of peer practitioners or facilitated by someone designated as the facilitator of the reflective discussions.

Both group and peer supervision need to facilitate critical reflection and address one or more of the supervision functions. Both need to prioritise the wellbeing of those involved. They can include discussions about their team care plan (see the Appendix for an example). It can be an invaluable addition to individual supervision, providing team members and peers the opportunity to:

- learn from and support one another
- normalise their shared experiences.<sup>36</sup>

## Collaborative supervision

**Supervision has traditionally been viewed as a relationship and process between one supervisor and one supervisee. This can put the supervisor in an unrealistic 'expert' role and one leader is unlikely to have the required skills and knowledge to meet all the needs of each supervisee.**

There has been a shift to embracing a more collaborative model of supervision. There can be benefits from using multiple supervisors, as well as peer supervision. For example, The Orange Door networks developed a matrix model of supervision that incorporates home agency supervisors and practice leaders. This offers more expertise and consultation.

Supervision agreements can assist in clarifying confidentiality, roles and communication channels in collaborative supervision.

Other programs include a mix of internal and external supervision, with external supervision being more clinical and reflective. Some programs use an external supervisor to facilitate peer supervision.<sup>37</sup> Individual practitioners also need to consider the supervision they need for their respective professional body registrations.

Regardless of the supervision arrangement, the regularity, quality, focus on reflective practice and the balance between the four functions, are the guiding factors in determining the adequacy of the arrangement.

For collaborative supervision to succeed, the following is recommended:

- everyone uses the same supervision model which clearly outlines the functions of supervision
- agreement regarding delegations and lines of accountability
- the responsibilities and actions, such as child protection reports, required for children and young people at risk are clear
- the line manager has overall responsibility for the team function and development across time
- the line manager has responsibility for monitoring and supporting the supervisees' wellbeing
- the line manager has overall responsibility for ensuring regular reflection and all four functions of supervision are provided to each supervisee.<sup>38</sup>



## Building a culture of supervision

**‘When I started as a team leader a year ago, there was an opportunity to formalise supervision and make it a regular occurrence.**

I took the opportunity to really think about how I could support each person. For example, if someone was having difficulty with a client and they didn't understand why they were being triggered by that person, bringing in formal supervision provided a space to unpack that so they could perform better. It also provided the opportunity to offer support around things like structural issues and oppression, workload, how the organisation works, and navigating uncertainty.

One of the most helpful things we did was draw up supervision agreements, which both the supervisor and supervisee sign. The agreement covers things like how the staff member likes to receive feedback, how they learn and how I can

best support their learning, and the designated time we set aside for supervision to ensure we make time for it without interruptions.

Now that we've been working together for a while, it's got to the point where I can walk into the office and I can tell by the looks on people's faces how they're travelling. Then how I respond to that depends on the individual and what might be culturally appropriate for each person.

In addition to formal supervision, I also have an open-door policy, so that my team can come and talk to me in moments when they are stuck rather than shutting it down until supervision. It is a helpful way to ensure the team can maintain work-life balance and put boundaries in place, so they don't take the burden home with them.'

**— Kelly Gannon, Team Leader,  
Winda-Mara Aboriginal Corporation,  
Health, Safety and Wellbeing seminar 1,  
February 2023**



# Role of the organisation, supervisor, and supervisee

**Supervision is a shared responsibility. This means that the organisation, supervisor and supervisee all have a role in making supervision and the supervisory relationship work.**

Some organisations think it is enough to have a supervision policy and structures in place to provide supervision. This 'set and leave' approach does not ensure quality supervision occurs and the needs of supervisees and supervisors are being met.



**'Too often we settle for having supervision rather than good supervision.'**

— Wonnacott and Morrison, 2010<sup>39</sup>

Strong organisational leadership is key to improving and prioritising supervision practices. This includes systems that ensure regular supervision occurs. Strong leadership also involves displaying behaviours that support supervision, such as:

- putting ethics into practice
- embracing strengths-based approaches
- promoting advocacy and transparency
- applying principles of self-determination, cultural safety and trauma and violence-informed practice.

The context in which supervision occurs matters and influences the supervisory relationship. Research shows that establishing a trusting and positive supervision relationship is a key driver to successful supervision.<sup>40</sup>

The following table can be applied to the different types of supervision to varying degrees.

**Table 1: Supervision roles, responsibilities and outcomes**

**Organisation**

Role	Responsibility	Outcome
<p><b>Provides direction and leadership about the importance of participating in supervision for all staff regardless of experience or level.</b></p>	<p>Ensures everyone has an understanding and appreciation of why supervision is important.</p> <p>Ensures all staff have an understanding how supervision, professional development and performance reviews are interconnected.</p> <p>Ensures participation in supervision is included in position descriptions and performance reviews.</p>	<p>Supervision is prioritised at every level.</p> <p>Expectations regarding supervision are documented and well understood.</p>
<p><b>Prioritises training about supervision and supports the development of supervisors.</b></p>	<p>Prioritises induction/training about supervision, reflective practice and trauma- and violence-informed principles for new practitioners.</p> <p>Develops succession planning strategies and provides clear pathways to become a supervisor.</p> <p>Prioritises supervision training for new and experienced supervisors.</p>	<p>Staff have a clear understanding about supervision and their responsibilities.</p> <p>Supervision training is viewed as a necessity for all staff.</p> <p>Supervisors are supported in their role.</p>
<p><b>Creates a culture supporting diversity, cultural safety in the workplace, and lived experience.</b></p>	<p>Ensures workforce strategies include the provision of culturally responsive supervision to develop and advance Aboriginal staff.</p> <p>Creates a safe environment, which allows staff from diverse backgrounds to talk about their own experiences of marginalisation and encourages others to hear this with humility and curiosity about their unknowing.</p> <p>Creates a culture which embraces practitioners with lived experience of family violence and sexual assault.</p> <p>There are clear channels to input supervision learnings about lived experience in the workforce into relevant policies and forums.</p>	<p>Aboriginal staff, either in ACCOs or mainstream agencies, can access culturally safe clinical supervision as per the Dhelk Dja Agreement.<sup>41</sup></p> <p>Staff understand how to embed cultural safety principles, policies and theory in supervision.</p> <p>Staff feel safe enough to disclose their own lived experience if they want to.</p>
<p><b>Embraces trauma- and violence-informed principles – Prioritises psychological, physical and emotional safety.</b></p>	<p>Understands possible causes of performance concerns such as systemic barriers, context, stress and workload.</p> <p>Facilitates discussions with the workforce about the culture and systems that can support and sustain effective supervision.</p> <p>Works towards having greater congruence between the policies and strategic goals with the actual organisational culture.</p>	<p>The organisation has a positive and safe workplace culture which incorporates trauma- and violence-informed practices and embraces compassionate leadership.</p>

## Organisation continued

Role	Responsibility	Outcome
<b>Creates a 'just' culture, promoting lifelong learning and development.</b>	<p>Allows vulnerability and an acceptance that mistakes can and do occur.</p> <p>Ensures continuous improvement processes are in place to support supervision.</p> <p>Develops mechanisms for practitioners to raise issues regarding quality of supervision and develop strategies to address this.</p>	<p>Staff feel valued and part of the solution-finding process and are provided professional development opportunities to develop own best practice.</p>
<b>Ensures there are adequate resources to support supervision.</b>	<p>Ensures the ratio of supervisees to supervisor is manageable so that supervisors have the time and energy to provide quality supervision.</p> <p>Ensures there are suitable and private spaces for supervision to occur.</p>	<p>The organisation and supervisors have the resources they need to provide effective supervision.</p>
<b>Ensures supervision is high-quality and aligns with best practice approaches.</b>	<p>Embeds supervision within a trauma- and violence-informed culture.</p> <p>Understands, models and supports reflection and reflective supervision and practices across the organisation.</p>	<p>Staff understand core trauma- and violence-informed principles and theory and how this can positively impact on workforce sustainability and clinical practices.</p>
<b>Ensures that supervision aligns with relevant laws, agreements, and policies.</b>	<p>Complies with, and provides evidence, of meeting the Social Services Standards.</p> <p>Develops systems to monitor and ensure supervision regularly occurs.</p> <p>Ensures there are up-to-date policies and procedures regarding supervision. These need to consider issues regarding confidentiality.</p>	<p>The organisation meets regulatory and best practice requirements in providing quality supervision for all staff.</p>
<b>Coordinates and leads advocacy.</b>	<p>Supports centring the voices and experiences of victim survivors in advocacy and supervisory practice.</p> <p>Uses information from supervision to identify structural and system barriers affecting practice (systemic function).</p>	<p>Supervision feeds into identifying structural and system barriers affecting practice and planning advocacy on a systemic level.</p>



## Supervisor

Role	Responsibility	Outcome
<b>Ensures the supervisee understands what supervision is and sets the scene regarding mutual expectations and how they will work together.</b>	<p>Completes a supervision agreement with each supervisee and reviews every six months.</p> <p>Supports the supervisee in receiving supervision training.</p> <p>Continues discussions during supervision about the benefits and functions of supervision.</p>	<p>Supervisees have up-to-date supervision agreements.</p> <p>Supervisee and supervisor are aligned regarding their understanding of their roles in the supervision process.</p>
<b>Works to make supervision as effective as they can.</b>	<p>Considers their energy levels, peak times of the day and ability to be present during supervision.</p> <p>Engages in supervision when centred and grounded, as much as possible given the fast-paced nature of the work.</p> <p>Adapts and tailors supervision to the needs of each supervisee.</p> <p>Engages with the organisation about the culture and system that can sustain supervisors in developing effective supervision.</p>	<p>Supervisor feels able and sustained to provide quality supervision.</p> <p>Supervisee feels supported, nurtured, heard and valued.</p> <p>All four supervisory functions are covered in supervision.</p>
<b>Supports the wellbeing of supervisees.</b>	<p>Monitors caseloads and provides an appropriate buffer to system demands.</p> <p>Checks in on how the supervisee is feeling during supervision sessions.</p> <p>Regularly asks what further support supervisees need to perform the role.</p>	<p>Supervisees feel valued, seen, supported and respected.</p>
<b>Creates learning partnerships with supervisees.</b>	<p>Adopts an open and curious approach.</p> <p>Acknowledges that they do not know everything, and the supervisee can contribute to their own learning.</p> <p>Adapts, accommodates, and attunes to the supervisee's learning preferences.</p> <p>Adopts a strengths-based approach.</p>	<p>Supervisees take responsibility and lead their own supervision sessions.</p>
<b>Supports the professional development of the supervisee.</b>	<p>Explores additional training the supervisee needs and facilitates attendance.</p> <p>Focuses on family violence and sexual assault risk and follows up on risk management activities.</p> <p>Applies a child-centred and family-focused approach to practice during supervision.</p> <p>Uses the <i>Family violence capability frameworks</i> to identify further support needs with the supervisee.</p>	<p>Supervisees improve their levels of confidence, knowledge, skills and practice.</p> <p>Staff are aware of the accountabilities of their role.</p>

## Supervisor continued

Role	Responsibility	Outcome
<b>Co-creates and maintains a trusting relationship with the supervisee.</b>	Facilitates a trusting relationship where mistakes and anxieties can be explored and helps supervisees contain and process their emotions. Uses a 'critical but mindful friend' <sup>42</sup> approach with the supervisee. Values supervisee input.	A trusting relationship develops between supervisor and supervisee such that challenging conversations can occur. Relationship ruptures and repairs are normalised.
<b>Supports reflective practice.</b>	Explores practitioner's fears, and the factors influencing practitioner assessment of their own safety. <sup>43</sup> Uses a coaching approach whereby reflective questions are used to enhance supervisee insight and learning. Assists practitioners to reflect on how their own personal and professional history might impact their professional attitudes and behaviour. <sup>44</sup>	Supervisee experiences a reflexive stretch in most sessions.
<b>Supports learning about diversity and focuses on cultural safety during supervision.</b>	Applies an intersectional feminist lens during supervision and other forums which allows staff from diverse backgrounds to talk about their individual experiences, with others hearing this with humility and curiosity about their unknowing. Considers cultural empowerment and explores the impacts of cultural load for First Nations staff.	Supervisees and supervisors are aware of their unconscious biases and adopt culturally safe practices. First Nations staff feel more supported in their role.
<b>Prioritises their own supervision.</b>	Reflects on their own supervisory and leadership style and considers the impact of this. Discusses their learning needs during their own supervision. Uses their own supervision and human resources support to explore use of formal authority, for example if there are performance issues.	Supervisor feels confident and supported in providing reflective supervision. Supervisor receives regular, quality supervision and grows as a supervisor.
<b>Explores differences in power relations at individual, team, organisation and systemic levels.</b>	Reflects on the supervisor – supervisee power differential during supervision. Reflects on use of power in relationships and how to work collaboratively and in partnership with others.	Supervisees and supervisors are aware of power dynamics. Staff work in partnership with clients and other professionals.
<b>Complies with supervision policies and laws</b>	Ensures supervision notes/ records are kept, providing evidence of strength-based approaches, and supporting Aboriginal people to exercise their cultural rights. <sup>45</sup>	There is a record providing a brief outline of every supervision session. These are kept in a safe place to ensure confidentiality.

## Supervisee

Role	Responsibility	Outcome
<b>Commits to fully participate in and be open to supervision.</b>	Co-creates, monitors and maintains a trusting relationship with the supervisor. Understands that being open about mistakes is a critical component of continuous improvement. Engages fully in supervision and accepts that it requires effort and 'work' on both parts.	Supervision sessions are purposeful and beneficial. Supervisee feels valued and supported by their supervisor, team and organisation. Supervisor feels engaged, valued, respected.
<b>Shares responsibility for their own learning and wellbeing needs.</b>	Engages in induction/ supervision training. Comes to supervision prepared, both physically and mentally. Understands the importance of collaborative supervision and seeks out alternate sources of supervision for their learning needs. Explores and discusses training options during supervision.	Supervisee learns about themselves, use of self in the work and about their role, responsibilities and professional boundaries.
<b>Helps lead the supervision sessions.</b>	Takes ownership of their own supervision by regularly attending, setting the agenda, asking key questions and focusing on their learning and wellbeing needs.	Supervisee feels more confident and sustained in their work.
<b>Articulates and brings theory into practice.</b>	Understands the processes of reflective practice and that the ability to critically reflect on own practice is desirable.	Clients receive client-centred professional services that are accessible, responsive, accountable, and demonstrate contemporary best practice.



# Principles underpinning best practice supervision

**These guidelines are supported by an agreed set of trauma-informed principles based on the Blue Knot Foundation model. Other trauma-informed models are equally useful, such as the Sanctuary Model.<sup>46</sup>**

In the family violence context, it can be useful to adopt a trauma- **and** violence-informed approach, which expands the concept to 'account for the intersecting impacts of systemic and interpersonal violence and structural inequities on a person's life'.<sup>47</sup>

Trauma and violence-informed principles can be useful in underpinning reflective supervision.<sup>48</sup> Especially since many supervisees and supervisors have their own lived experience of trauma, or family or sexual violence and the impacts of inequality, discrimination and marginalisation. Talking with practitioners, who have not experienced trauma and who benefit from privilege, about the principles and impacts of trauma and violence is equally crucial.

A trauma- and violence-informed approach also assists supervisors and supervisees to have explicit conversations about the power dynamics that may impact their relationship.

This approach aligns with the *Framework for trauma-informed practice*,<sup>49</sup> which promotes reflective supervision as a key strategy in creating trauma-informed workplaces.





**Table 2: Trauma-informed principles in practice adapted from the Blue Knot Practice Guidelines<sup>50</sup>**

Principle	What this looks like	Reflective questions
<b>Safety</b>	Foster physical, psychological, identity and cultural safety in all interactions.	<p>How does your organisation create safety for supervisees and supervisors?</p> <p>How can we create greater safety in our supervisory relationship?</p> <p>How can you create safer relationships with clients, colleagues and other professionals?</p>
<b>Trust</b>	Invest in inclusive relationships that focus on mutual respect, dignity, and transparent, unbiased communication.	<p>Does your organisation demonstrate trauma sensitivity and responsiveness at all levels of contact?</p> <p>How do you and your organisation convey reliability to the workforce and clients?</p>
<b>Choice</b>	Provide freedom for supervisees and supervisors to align their approaches with their values and ethics.	<p>How do you embed discussions about values and ethics during supervision?</p> <p>How does supervision provide choice for supervisees (and in turn clients) where it is available and appropriate? In what ways?</p>
<b>Collaboration</b>	Share power and work in solidarity to support sustainability at a team, organisation, funding body and sector level.	<p>How does your supervision style develop a sense of 'doing with' rather than 'doing to'?</p> <p>How can you collaborate better with clients and other professionals?</p>
<b>Empowerment</b>	Develop individual and collective strengths by acknowledging each other's contributions and feedback or feedforward for continuous learning and reflection.	<p>Is empowering supervisees and clients an ongoing goal of supervision and your organisation?</p> <p>How is this goal enabled by supervision, service systems, programs and processes?</p> <p>How does supervision and your organisation enable cultural empowerment?</p>
<b>Respect for inclusion and diversity</b>	Develop an awareness that attitudes, systems and structures can interact to create inequality and exclusion. Respect diversity that includes intersecting social characteristics such as but not limited to cultural background, Aboriginality, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, age, mental health, socioeconomic status, religion and disability.	<p>How does supervision and your organisation convey and enact respect for workforce and client diversity in all its forms? In what ways?</p> <p>How does supervision and your organisation promote cultural safety?</p> <p>How do you know that you are practising with cultural safety and inclusion in mind?</p>

# Frameworks that inform supervision

**Family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing workforces come from different theoretical backgrounds and frameworks of practice. It is important for agencies and teams to select which framework suits them best for their work and their role.**

The frameworks provided are not exhaustive. They are included to describe how they might inform supervision. Further reading is provided at the end of the guidelines for more in-depth exploration of each framework.

## Trauma-informed framework

**This framework incorporates an understanding about the impacts of trauma, including vicarious and cumulative trauma on supervisees and the need for trust with their supervisor and the broader organisation. It recognises that when staff feel consciously or unconsciously unsafe, the brain-body response interferes with decision-making and self-regulation.**

The aim of supervision is to reduce stress and the impacts of vicarious and cumulative trauma on supervisees. Supervision can contribute to building supervisee resilience. Trauma-informed practices, underpinned by the principles outlined above, help with these aims.

By normalising practitioner reactions to the challenges of working with traumatised people, shame is reduced. Supervisors can make a difference by acknowledging supervisee strengths and the emotional toll of the work. They can do this in a way that is compassionate, empathic and understanding, rather than blaming or pathologising.



This framework is sometimes criticised for being too individualistic, even though it includes the concept of trauma-organised cultures. This is where chronic stress and adversity leads to subtle adaptations that eventually rob an organisation of basic interpersonal safety, trust and health.<sup>51</sup> This includes the risk of parallel processing, whereupon the practitioners, agency and system mirror the characteristics of the traumatised 'client' population, such as chaos and fragmentation. This can negatively affect interpersonal dynamics when working with clients, colleagues and team culture.

Trauma-informed frameworks are often a part of a broader model (for example, the Sanctuary Model) for creating an organisational culture that can more effectively provide a 'cohesive context' within which healing from traumatic experiences can occur.<sup>52</sup> Like any cultural change process, becoming a more trauma aware, sensitive, responsive and, ultimately, informed organisation requires attention and time.<sup>53</sup>

## Trauma- and violence-informed framework

**A trauma- and violence-informed framework expands on the concept of trauma-informed supervision. It considers the intersecting impacts of systemic and interpersonal violence and structural inequities of a person's life.<sup>54</sup> This means that the adverse impacts of family and sexual violence trauma are understood within the broader context of patriarchal social conditions, intersectional oppression, and systemic violence and discrimination.<sup>55</sup>**

This includes taking an intersectional view to highlight current and historical experiences of violence, so issues are not seen as originating within the person. Instead, these aspects of their life experience are seen as adaptations and consequences of trauma and violence.

To apply a trauma- and violence-informed lens to supervision, an organisation must reflect on multiple aspects of the system:

- the physical environment – where people work and meet for supervision
- supervisory relationships and team support – sense of belonging and morale
- openness to two-way communication
- the potential for parallel processes occurring – where systems inadvertently repeat the patterns clients have already experienced
- willingness to highlight instances of parallel processing 'playing out' in relationships
- systemic injustice and discrimination, such as racism
- responses to vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue.<sup>56</sup>

Supervision that incorporates a trauma- and violence-informed approach helps guard against trauma-organised systems developing. Such supervision is underpinned by the above principles and an organisation focused on:

- intending to do no harm and avoiding inadvertent re-traumatising clients and staff
- using a person-centred approach during supervision which harnesses a person's inherent strengths, autonomy and dignity, maximising their choices and control over their lives<sup>57</sup>
- understanding the effects of negative stress on the brain (which can impair listening, decision making and self-regulation) and body
- understanding that behaviours during times of stress, can stem from childhood coping strategies which are no longer effective
- understanding that vicarious trauma is inevitable, but this does not mean it will necessarily cause harm
- exploring ways supervisees can use supervision, harness self and collective care, and other supports such as EAP, to reduce vicarious trauma risks
- listening to understand how supervisees make meaning of their responses to trauma, including vicarious and cumulative trauma, within the context of their own lived experience<sup>58</sup>

- partnering with supervisees and people who have experienced violence and sexual assault
- improving interventions with perpetrators
- surfacing vicarious resilience and compassion satisfaction
- appreciating the importance of, and incorporating, client voices, including those of children and young people
- understanding ongoing structural inequalities for our clients, including children and young people, and our workforces.

There has been criticism about the trauma discourse because it rarely names and addresses systemic injustice and racism<sup>59</sup> and risks pathologising trauma as an individual's problem.<sup>60</sup> Trauma- and violence-informed supervision, however, includes the exploration of systemic injustice and racism. It also offers a space to explore the impact of various stressors and look for signs of vicarious resilience in the work with clients.<sup>61</sup>

## Attachment-based framework

**This framework incorporates an understanding of adult attachment theory and its potential impact on supervisory relationships and practice. Supervisees and supervisors often show similar attachment dynamics in their close relationships as they do in the supervisory relationship.**<sup>62</sup>

The framework has been included in the Guidelines because supervision:

- is always relational
- involves some degree of vulnerability
- may be influenced by attachment dynamics<sup>63</sup>
- can activate the attachment patterns of both the supervisee and supervisor<sup>64</sup>
- fits with trauma- and violence-informed theory and practice, which incorporates attachment theory.

Alongside other factors, the experience of attachment can impact on supervisors and supervisees:

- being able to form trusting relationships
- seeking help
- being able to self-regulate
- developing resilience
- feeling burned out<sup>65</sup>
- becoming 'stuck' in unhelpful and repetitive patterns of behaviour<sup>66</sup>
- being effective leaders.<sup>67</sup>

Although the quality of supervisory relationships cannot be solely explained by attachment patterns,<sup>68</sup> more secure patterns have been linked to greater satisfaction with supervision.<sup>69</sup>

This framework can add insight into why we interact with one another and respond to stress like we do. It is not expected for supervisors and supervisees to try and determine one another's attachment pattern. The key is to understand the strengths and challenges associated with the resulting dynamic.<sup>70</sup>

Understanding attachment can assist supervisors to reframe supervisee's responses when they become anxious and overwhelmed by the work.<sup>71</sup> This in turn, can prevent labelling the supervisee as the 'problem' and a spiral into a negative feedback loop developing between the supervisor and supervisee, otherwise known as the 'set-up-to fail' syndrome (see section 'When supervision becomes tricky' on supervisor-supervisee conflict).

Like attachment, the goal of supervision is to provide a secure base for the supervisee to experiment, gain confidence, test their knowledge and skills and grow. An understanding of attachment concepts like 'secure base' and 'safe haven' helps practitioners and supervisors contain fears and anxieties and assist in keeping the supervisee regulated.



Some family violence supervisors have described the importance of adopting the attachment-based 'bigger, stronger, wiser and kinder' approach to their role.<sup>72</sup> When this approach is grounded in a culture where reactions are openly discussed, and self-reflection and insight is actively encouraged, supervision can become safe, nurturing and supportive.

This framework needs to be applied to First Nations practitioners in a culturally safe way. This includes taking into consideration cultural differences, such as the notion of 'multiple mothering' or caregiving within Aboriginal communities.

Furthermore, the framework will need to be adapted for practitioners from diverse backgrounds. Supervisors need to consider how racism, homophobia, other forms of discrimination and marginalisation, and prejudice interact with the practitioner's unique attachment history and personal experiences in relation to race, culture, class, faith, gender, sexuality, age and disability.

## Strengths-based framework

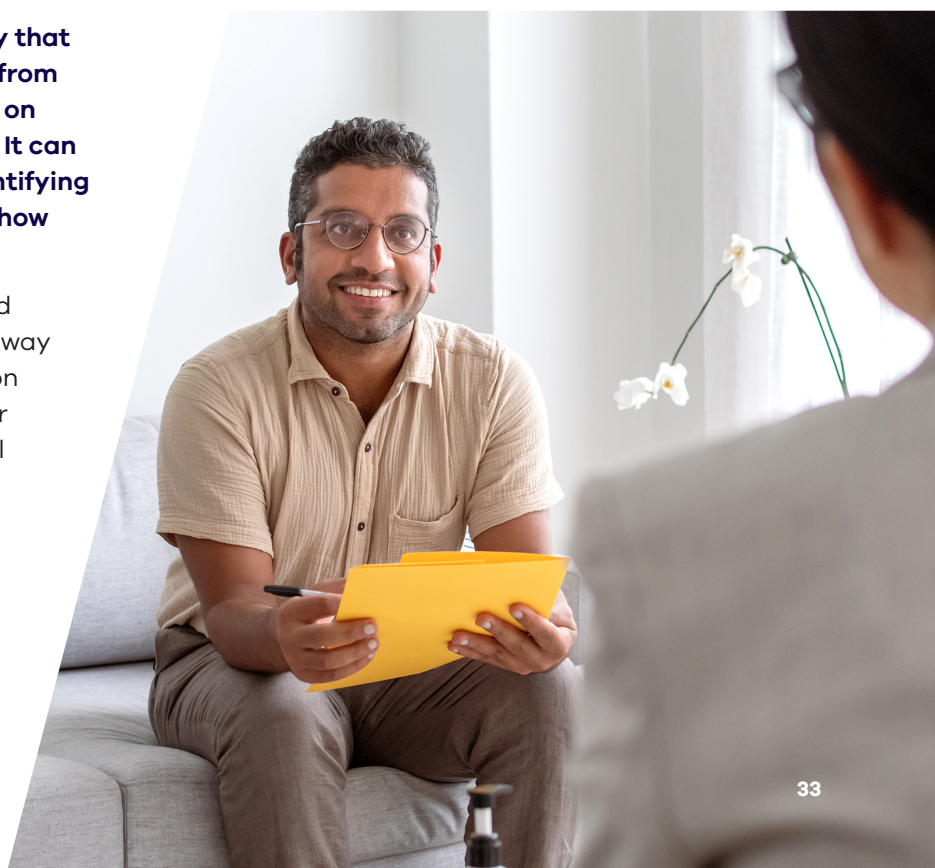
**A strengths-based approach is a theory that represents a 'paradigmatic shift away from problem-focused approaches', to focus on resilience, growth and empowerment.<sup>73</sup> It can be a way of handling challenges by identifying existing strengths of an individual and how they may be applied in the situation.**

A strengths-based approach can be used in supervision. This approach involves a 'way of being' with supervisees where attention is given to power 'with' rather than power 'over'.<sup>74</sup> This approach is less hierarchical and acknowledges the expertise and strengths of the supervisee alongside the supervisor.

As stated previously, there is a role for the supervisor to hold the victim survivor experience at the centre of practice and ensure quality service delivery and accountability. Adopting a strengths-based approach does not contradict this but rather sits alongside it. A strengths-based approach can recognise and discuss the power dynamics that exist in the supervisor-supervisee relationship, and foster a relationship built upon shared values and principles of equity, respect, collaboration and empowerment.

Strengths-based supervision involves:

- using structured and reflective supervision where possible, rather than crisis-driven supervision which suggests a problem orientation
- the supervisor assuming a facilitator role, where both the supervisor and supervisee learn from each other
- focusing on language and identifying supervisor, supervisee and client strengths, as well as challenges during supervision.<sup>75</sup>



# Reflective supervision

**Supervision creates space for reflective practice.<sup>76</sup> Reflective supervision counters privileging thinking, efficiency, logic, formal knowledge and theories over emotions and facilitates a deeper examination of the work.**

In a trusting relationship, supervision focuses on being proactive in practice and decision-making, instead of reactive. Practitioners may not be aware of their feelings and subsequent reactions. Reflective questioning can ensure we recognise and process them.<sup>77</sup>

**‘A focus on managing “the doing” rather than on developing “the feeling” and “thinking” aspects significantly contributes to practitioners feeling unsupported by their supervisors.’**

— Gibbs, Dwyer and Vivekanandra, 2014<sup>78</sup>

In one-to-one reflective supervision, the supervisee leads the reflective supervision session. The supervisor suggests areas to explore. They assist the supervisee to find their own wisdom, rather than giving advice or direction. To encourage deep reflection the supervisor notices, challenges and invites the supervisee to be mindful of their actions and assumptions in a way that is non-judgemental, positive and hopeful.<sup>79</sup>

Regular reflective supervision should be prioritised within organisations. Time is a precious commodity in fast-paced, busy organisations, which is at odds with the slow, thoughtful space needed for reflective supervision.

To engage in deep reflection, supervision needs to occur in a private and suitable location. Supervisees must feel they have the time to explore subjects and feelings uninterrupted and be truly present. (Some supervisors set aside two hours for this.)

During peer or group supervision, there needs to be a high level of psychological safety for deep critical and process reflection. For this reason, reflective practice often works best in a closed group setting. This provides the group with time and regular contact to build familiarity and trust.

**‘Effective supervision is never passive and requires intention and work from both parties so that there is a reflective stretch.’**

— Tracy Castelino, Director, ShantiWorks

## Why is reflective supervision so important?

Reflective supervision is particularly important for the sector because:

- These workforces are exposed to unique psychological health, safety and wellbeing risks. It is important to recognise and normalise the impact on practitioners’ emotions, behaviours and reactions. Vicarious trauma and employee burnout are widespread issues.
- Practitioners work on a micro level to address structural and systemic problems. They may experience fatigue and burnout as a result.
- Systemic discrimination and racism in Australia mean extra health, safety and wellbeing impacts on First Nations practitioners and those from diverse communities. These practitioners often work with their own communities and carry a ‘cultural load’.
- Person-centred practice is dependent on the quality of relationships between practitioners

and clients. This includes being able to develop rapport, trust and empathy. It includes bringing the 'whole self' to practice.

- It is healthy to discuss experiences and feelings related to working with risk, uncertainty, anxiety, engagement and decision-making.
- Supervisors play a crucial role in developing, sustaining and retaining the workforce. They need their own reflective supervision to model the process and grow as leaders.

**'The only way to prevent being affected would be to eliminate human relationships and emotions by becoming a robot. This would exclude the best of what we bring to our work – ourselves.'**

— Hewson and Carrol, 2016<sup>80</sup>

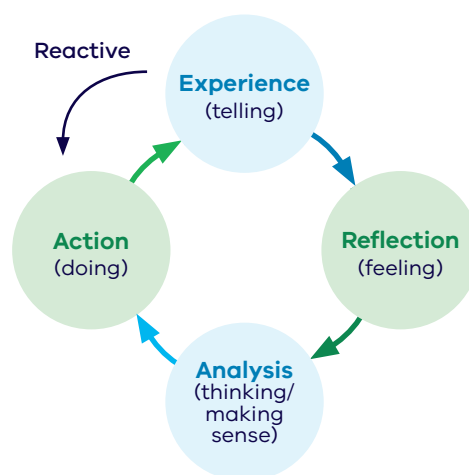
## What is reflection?

In its simplest form, reflection is a 'state of mind',<sup>81</sup> rather than a technique. It prompts us to pause and notice, and then consider the meaning of what we noticed.<sup>82</sup> It is a continuous, cyclical process which contributes to self-awareness and professional learning (see Figure 1 below). Reflection encourages staff to consider their impact on others, including clients and colleagues. It assists staff to monitor the wellbeing of others and encourages organisational and collective care of the workforce. It is a bridge between theory and practice and improves decision-making. Learning, rather than problem solving, is the primary focus.<sup>83</sup>

Reflection features:

- active listening, sitting with silence and the discomfort of not always knowing
- a stance of curiosity
- open questions to make sense of situations and to support knowledge for decision-making
- empathy and non-judgement to work through complex issues, emotions and reactions in a safe-enough space
- vulnerability, allowing participants to ease the need to always appear self-reliant and strong
- a critical approach and 'sitting outside' our personal experience to notice how the system might be experienced by others.<sup>84</sup>

**Figure 1: KOLB reflective learning cycle<sup>85</sup>**



This reflective learning cycle provides the 'how' of the reflective supervision. The idea is to regularly reflect on all four learning processes (experience, reflection, analysis and action), moving from surface to depth and shifting between them, as required.<sup>86</sup> It assists supervisees and supervisors to unpack an experience and better understand it. The goal is to be less reactive, learn from reflection and improve decision making. The model can be used to process various experiences. These might include conflict with other professionals, case practice with clients and the dynamics experienced in the supervisory relationship.

## Questions that accompany the learning cycle processes

### Experience questions

- Tell me about the case.
- What happened during the contact?
- What was the purpose of the contact?
- What do we know about the client(s) background, their strengths and supports available?
- What happened when you spoke with (family member/other professional)?
- How would you describe the client's demeanour?
- What did you notice about yourself during the contact?
- What have other professionals said about the client(s)?

### Reflection questions

- What were your feelings towards the client(s) during the contact?
- How would you describe your relationship with the client(s)?
- What is the client's relationship like with their family, friends, and other services?
- Does the client remind you of anybody?
- Describe any differences between this contact and previous contact.
- How do you think the client is feeling? What is this based on?
- How do you feel after the contact?
- What biases or assumptions about the situation or client(s) might have influenced you?

### Analysis questions

- How did you make sense of what the client(s) told you or any changes you have noticed?
- What are the client's strengths and what resources can they use?
- What are the challenges and risks?
- Did the contact confirm or challenge your previous thoughts about the client(s)' situation?
- What evidence is there to support this?
- Is there any research that might assist us to think about the implications of the information we have?
- What information is missing?
- What professional development or research do you think might help you with this case?

### Action questions

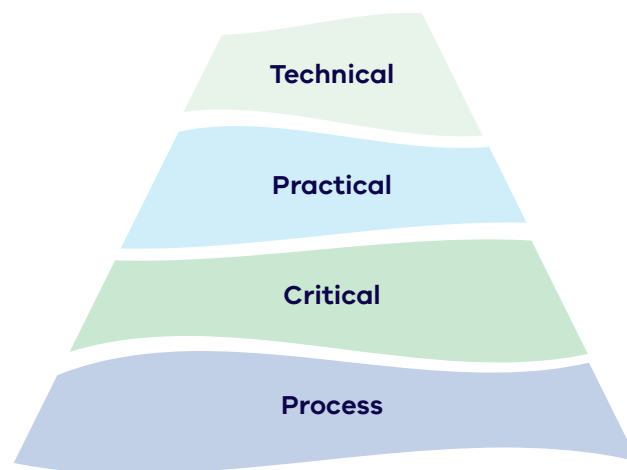
- Given our reflection, what do you think we need to do and why?
- What other options are there?
- What does the client(s) want?
- What do you want to achieve with the client(s)?
- What might the client(s) think about your role and what do they need from you?
- What is urgent versus desirable?
- What support or information do you need to make the next step?
- What information do you need to share with other professionals?
- How do you see your role going forward?
- How do you plan to use your positional power going forward?
- How can I support you?



## Four levels of reflection

It can be helpful to consider the following four levels of reflection:<sup>87</sup>

- **Technical reflection** compares performance with knowledge of what should have happened. It is useful in addressing accountability and compliance issues.
- **Practical reflection** relates to the supervisees' self-evaluation, insight and learning. *Reflection on action* (after the experience) enhances a practitioner's ability to do *reflection in action*. This involves being able to use experience and intuition to respond in the moment.
- **Critical reflection** acknowledges that understanding is never complete. Understanding is continuously evolving and is influenced by the social and political context. It is an important process to uncover and explore power, assumptions, biases and values at an individual, team and organisational level. This reflection informs and improves practice, as well as raising the moral and ethical aspects of practice. It is crucial for embedding intersectionality.
- **Process reflection** explores conscious, unconscious and intuitive aspects of practice even when it is difficult or uncomfortable. It delves into the psychological aspects of the work, exploring client and supervisee histories, motivations, behaviours and reactions. This process can use trauma, attachment and systems theories to explore the complex dynamics and patterns of interacting.



All four levels of reflection are important, depending on the context and type of supervision, such as managerial or clinical supervision.

## Reflexivity

The sector often uses the term reflexivity, which is like reflection. Simply, reflection leads to insight about something, whereas reflexivity involves finding strategies to question our 'attitudes, values, assumptions, prejudices, and habitual actions'. Reflexivity helps us understand how we contribute to the dynamic with others.<sup>88</sup>

Reflexivity extends the reflective learning cycle. It is a deeper process, like critical and process reflection. Reflexivity can prevent generalising client stories and enables supervisees to see what is unique about every case. It involves clarity and awareness of the way practitioners are experienced and perceived by others.

We make sense of situations through stories. Therefore, strategies to enhance reflexivity include journaling about the work and regularly doing through-the-mirror writing.<sup>89</sup> This is where practitioners use imaginative stories, drawn from experience, to explore the problems, anguish and the joys of practice. These can be shared and discussed with colleagues and supervisors to increase learning about the self.

**'To be reflexive is to examine ... how we – seemingly unwittingly – are involved in creating social or professional structures counter to our own values (destructive of diversity, and institutionalising power imbalance, for example). It is becoming aware of the limits of our knowledge, of how our own behaviour plays into organisational practices and why such practices might marginalise groups or exclude individuals.'**

— Bolton, 2009<sup>90</sup>

## Reflection readiness

Reflection is not always a positive and desirable process and both supervisees and supervisors need to be ready to move into reflective practice.<sup>91</sup> This is because exploring the more challenging and difficult aspects of practice requires motivation, energy and openness and we can become self-protective. Supervisors need an empathic, non-judgemental approach and to gauge the supervisee's willingness to explore deep reflection.

Sometimes, there are tensions. Organisations must balance wanting a healthy learning culture that embraces reflective practice and feedback/feedforward, with practitioner reflection readiness.

**'It can be difficult to embed reflective practice at first because it involves time and conscious effort but with persistence it becomes natural and habitual.'**

— Hewson and Carroll, 2016<sup>92</sup>

# Reflection in action

## Safety

It is useful to think of safety along a continuum rather than a binary model of feeling safe or unsafe. Practitioners sometimes point to lack of safety for not engaging in supervision or challenging conversations. This may be more about feeling uncomfortable, which is necessary for growth and learning. The concept of being 'safe enough' to be vulnerable and willing to explore the impacts of the work is more useful than using the language of 'being unsafe'.<sup>93</sup> Yet, if after their own reflection a supervisee genuinely feels there is a lack of safety in their supervisory relationship, organisations need to provide a system to hear and review this.

When thinking about safety, it is important to also ensure that organisations and supervisors create an environment that is culturally responsive and safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supervisees and people from other diverse communities.

**'Some of the issues that come up in practice are challenging and can trigger strong emotions. If I notice I'm having a particularly strong emotional reaction to what a supervisee is saying, a client or interaction, I like to imagine I am sitting in a tree.'**

In the tree, I imagine that I am looking out and observing the situation, and I ask myself 'why is this affecting me?' This can help me to view the situation from the outside and provides some distance between me and what is happening.

I also use this exercise as a supervisor to prompt reflection. Sometimes I like to give the supervisee a leaf or twig to help ground them and symbolise our connection. Reflecting in this way helps practitioners to pause and connect with what's going on in their mind and body. It can be a powerful way to provide space for the supervisee and invite them to dig deeper and reflect on how they are feeling and reacting to their practice.'

**— Daphne Yarram, CEO, Yoowinna Wurnalung Aboriginal Healing Service**



# Support and development of supervisors

## Critical role of supervisors

**Supervisors are critical to cultural change, implementing policy reform and sustaining practitioners. They are at the forefront of supporting practitioners developing their skills and performing in their roles.**

Providing effective supervision requires considerable energy and emotional intelligence. It requires a relaxed, mindful stance of the supervisor to properly be present and provide containment for emotions.

The role is challenging and a significant shift from the practitioner role. Not only do supervisors need to be skilled and knowledgeable about case theory and practice, but they need to know how to develop and hold practitioners in mind and care for them. They are cultural leaders in terms of regularly reflecting on cultural safety, adopting an intersectional feminist lens and trauma- and violence-informed practices.

They are 'sandwiched', and often the conduit, between practitioners and upper management and vice versa. They may be higher in the organisational hierarchy than their supervisees, but they do not necessarily have access to more resources or real power to enact change.<sup>94</sup>

Furthermore, tension can arise when supervisors have line management and clinical supervision responsibilities. Line management responsibilities have the potential to reinforce the power and organisational hierarchy and place pressure on the supervisory relationship.

**'If supervisors do not prioritise supervision, neither will staff.'**

— *Jacky Tucker, State-wide RAMP Coordinator, Safe and Equal, 2023*

## Transitioning to supervisor

The transition from colleague or peer to supervisor can be complex and difficult to navigate. It highlights issues of power and authority not previously experienced with colleagues. It requires conscious reflection on how the new relationship can be negotiated.<sup>95</sup>

Despite the challenging and important role, some supervisors may be relatively new to the sector. Supervisors in other fields report that their selection to the role involved no discussion or testing of their supervisory commitment, knowledge, or skill.<sup>96</sup> This is not uncommon in these sectors as well. Furthermore, some do not receive supervision training (up to one in five<sup>97</sup>) nor their own regular supervision.

This means that some supervisors have only their own experience of supervision to guide them and the transition to supervisor is a 'sink or swim' experience.<sup>98</sup>

**'Training as a supervisor is a necessity not a luxury ... it is more difficult to unlearn than learn.'**

— *Carroll, 2014*<sup>99</sup>

To help recruit, transition, and sustain supervisors, the following is recommended:

- selection questions that ask about their views and intended approach in providing supervision
- clear position descriptions and policies which outline their role
- shadowing opportunities (where a transitioning supervisor follows an experienced supervisor as they perform their role) for a day or two, allowing time for the transitioning supervisor to ask questions



- mentoring from more experienced supervisors as they commence in the role, and coaching as their learning needs change and they become more experienced
- supervision training, ideally within three months of starting the role
- regular, quality supervision which allows for the exploration of uncertainties and anxieties and facilitates self-reflection
- regular peer supervision so supervisors can learn from and gain support from a network of peers, in a learning community.<sup>100</sup>

Supervision training is an important early step in supporting and developing supervisors but should be accompanied by additional support (shadowing, mentoring and receiving their own supervision) to translate knowledge into practice.<sup>101</sup>

## Developing supervisors

These guidelines are designed to further assist the development of supervisors since consistency of language, clear definitions, standards, and sector-specific supervision functions are important contributors to learning. It makes sense that if supervisors are clear on their role and the process of supervision, this will influence the supervisee's understanding.

Developing supervisors who can adopt an authoritative style is important. This is characterised by a 'come with me' approach. It provides clear structures, focus and expectations for supervisees, combined with high emotional intelligence (empathy and containment). It features reflection, ongoing learning and joint problem solving. The balance between high expectations for practice and responsiveness to the supervisee's needs is the crucial aspect of this style.<sup>102</sup> An authoritative style of supervision promotes authoritative practice with clients.

Compare this to slipping into authoritarian, permissive or neglectful supervisory styles, which can create conflict and practice issues.

For instance, an authoritarian style is likely to result in the supervisor focusing on demands and outputs. There is a lack of interest in the supervisee's opinion. The emotional impact of the work is rarely explored.<sup>103</sup> This risks the supervisee lacking confidence in their own skills and judgement and becoming dependent upon the supervisor.

The authoritative supervisor is more likely to:

- strike a healthy balance between support and challenge
- minimise focusing on quality control and monitoring, thereby creating a culture where trust develops, and mistakes are discussed<sup>104</sup>
- be open to hearing how the work is impacting emotionally on the supervisee
- talk about supervisee signs of enmeshment with or disconnection from their clients<sup>105</sup>
- use their own supervision to reflect on the supervisory relationship dynamics
- be honest about the limitations of their influence, which helps build trust<sup>106</sup>
- develop practitioners who show a healthy balance between autonomy and dependency<sup>107</sup>
- develop practitioners who are confident and able to positively engage and empower clients.<sup>108</sup>

**'The capacity to supervise in a challenging yet caring way must be acknowledged as a highly skilled job.'**

— *Judith Gibbs, 2001*<sup>109</sup>

Like all aspects of supervision and supervisory relationships, the behaviour and style of supervisors is influenced by the broader organisational culture, system demands and stress levels.

Refer to the section on 'Supervisor training and capability' for further details on standards for supervisor training and development.

# Understanding and sustaining the workforce

**'Practitioners need to experience being dignified to foster the moral courage required to be vulnerable, open to critique, and resist engaging in supervision, with a static defence against negative judgements. Creating relationships with the intention of guarding against violations of the practitioners' dignity is at the heart of my supervision work.'**

— Vikki Reynolds, 2014<sup>110</sup>

**There is evidence that structured, supportive and reflective supervision helps to improve practitioner retention<sup>111</sup> and performance. This results in higher-quality services. Australian-based social workers 'passionately' value supervision as an 'indispensable function' that makes a positive contribution to their professional development.<sup>112</sup>**

For programs to be safe for clients, they must also be safe for workforces. This means management must consider organisational stress, demands and pressure and how these factors affect workforce anxiety.<sup>113</sup>

Organisations need a plan to manage this stress.<sup>114</sup> This requires a broad understanding of the effects of negative stress (noting some stress is necessary and positive) on individuals.

Supervision can play a crucial role in reducing anxiety and stress associated with the work.<sup>115</sup> Providing safety also involves prioritising workforce wellbeing and being sensitive to signs of vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and burnout.

Family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing work can disrupt a practitioner's worldview. It can lead them to think violence is everywhere and it can affect their views about their current and past relationships.

Working within an imperfect system can also make practitioners feel unable to support clients in the way they would like to. This can lead to feelings of helplessness. It can also take a 'collective toll' on practitioners.

Supervisors need to be empathic, help practitioners maintain perspective and plan for how they might advocate for systemic change.

A positive supervisory relationship is key to good quality supervision and to supervisees' satisfaction with supervision.<sup>116</sup>

## Zone of fabulousness

To avoid burnout and do this work, practitioners need each other and need to be in solidarity with one another. It is important to place the client at the centre of the work. When colleagues transgress boundaries and become either enmeshed (the hero) or disconnected (the victim) from their clients and work, teams need to collectively bring them back to the zone where their best work can occur.<sup>117</sup>

Supervisors play a key role in gauging when supervisees (including leaders) are not in the zone. Through sensitive and honest conversations, they can invite them back into the zone.

This complements the trauma-based 'window of tolerance' model,<sup>118</sup> which describes what happens when people, including clients and practitioners, become dysregulated.

## Supporting a 'just' culture

Sustaining and building the workforce requires organisations to commit to a culture of continuous learning and improvement through the lens of intersectionality. This includes the concept of 'just' culture.

A 'just' culture 'recognises that individuals should not be held accountable for system failings. It is a culture of trust, learning and accountability', where 'staff are not punished for actions taken by them that are proportionate to their experience, training and role, but where there is accountability for reckless behaviour and an absence of care.'<sup>119</sup>

A 'just' culture means that wellbeing of staff is prioritised.

A supportive learning culture at an organisation level is essential to ensure that supervision offers a space for safe, reflective practice.<sup>120</sup>

Supervision can also promote 'just' culture, through providing a space for open reflection, learning and acknowledgement of the systemic issues which impact on practice and on practitioners.

## 'Supervision helps clarify the sticking points and centres me in relation to the political and ethical nature of our work.'

— Victorian-based supervisor, 2022

## How to support practitioners through supervision

To understand and sustain practitioners, it is recommended:

- supervisors communicate that they will and do invest in the supervisee's wellbeing and professional growth<sup>121</sup>
- supervisors strike a balance between support and challenge, with the latter requiring trust between supervisor and supervisee
- supervisors provide a 'container' for emotions that may arise
- supervisors use a strengths-based approach and explore how best to leverage supervisees' strengths
- supervisors show that they value the supervisee and the team
- both parties are mindful of signs of transgressing boundaries of enmeshment or disconnection as a way of coping with the work and openly discuss this possibility
- supervision regularly includes discussion about practice, knowledge and skill levels. The supervisor and supervisee need to communicate when a mentoring (more directive), teaching or coaching (involves the supervisor stepping back and asking open reflective questions) style is required
- supervision attends to all four functions of supervision and prioritises reflection, including deeper reflection
- supervision involves feedback and feedforward (focusing on future behaviour) occurring between supervisor and supervisee and vice versa
- negotiating a supervision agreement at the start of the supervisory relationship and reviewing this agreement every six to 12 months.

## 'Stay close to the twin priorities of imparting knowledge and building supervisees skills with boosting their confidence, morale and sense of hope.'

— Livni, Crowe and Gonsalvez, 2012<sup>122</sup>

## Reflective exercise

### Supervisor questions to explore the emotional impacts of the work<sup>123</sup>

- What supports do you need when work is difficult or personally challenging?
- How will I and the team know when the work is touching personal issues for you?
- How would you like to deal with this in supervision if it happens for you?
- Do you have a clear sense of how your work and life influence each other?  
If so, what are you comfortable sharing/ do I need to know to support you better?  
If not, what would help you gain a clearer sense of that?
- When systemic issues arise how do we want to discuss these and plan to improve things during supervision?
- If I thought the work might be touching issues and making you uncomfortable, would it be okay for me to raise it? How would you like me to do that?
- If you thought our relationship was touching issues or making me uncomfortable, how would you let me know?





# Lived experience in the workforce

**‘Don’t pity, patronise or feel sorry for people with lived experience – highlight resilience. In the Aboriginal community, we call them “woman warriors”.’**

— Kat, Victim Survivors’ Advisory Council member, 2023

**Lived experience in the workforce refers to people who work in the sector as practitioners, leaders, advisors, researchers, administrators, students and in many other roles, who have experienced, or are experiencing, family violence or sexual assault. Or they may have experience of using the system or supporting someone close to them directly impacted by family violence or sexual assault.**

Lived experience is a broad term that can be applied to other experiences and identities, such as gender, disability, sexuality and cultural background. For this section, lived experience relates to family and sexual violence as described above.

The gendered nature of the sector and the prevalence of violence against women and family violence means that many practitioners will have their own lived experience of violence or sexual assault. Organisations and workplaces need to be sensitive to this reality and develop trauma-informed cultures that support such workforces.

Lived experience can be a motivating factor in choosing to work in the sector,<sup>124</sup> as practitioners seek out purposeful and meaningful work which enables them to give back to their communities. This altruism and values-driven motivation is positive.

The family violence and sexual assault sectors were founded from lived experience. The sectors had their origins in the personal experiences of the women who established the first refuges, rape crisis centres and support services for women and children.

However, as the sector has developed, lived experience in the workforce has become less visible, with practitioners reporting they feel reluctant to disclose their own lived experience to their workplace for fear of negative consequences for their career.<sup>125</sup>

Some practitioners have shared that when they joined organisations with cultures where their experiences were valued and embraced, they felt safe, supported, nurtured and understood.

**‘Cultures where there is a silencing of worker lived experience, risks burnout and retention issues whereas safe cultures result in a greater sense of belonging.’**

— Panel member, *Aligning the Personal with the Professional Conference*, 2022



Supervisors and workplaces can support practitioners with lived experience during supervision, and assist in the development of a positive workplace culture that values and embraces lived experience, by recognising that:

- practitioner lived experience is valuable, meaningful and a strength of the sector
- the decision to disclose one's lived experience is a highly personal one. Some practitioners will choose not to disclose, or will share with certain work colleagues but not others
- practitioners should feel safe and respected whether they choose to disclose or not
- practitioners who choose not to disclose need to feel that lived experience is valued, respected and important as an input to their work, in a broader positive, workplace culture sense
- supervisors and leaders sharing their own lived experience stories can have a powerful impact. It can contribute to a positive workplace culture in relation to lived experience and reduce the potential for shame. However, there is never an expectation that a person with lived experience must share it
- there is a high probability that supervisees will have their own lived experience, and supervisors need to be 'sensitive to this reality',<sup>126</sup> using a trauma- and violence-informed approach during supervision
- practitioner lived experience can provide supervisees, teams and programs with additional insight about family violence, sexual assault and the system
- there needs to be a commitment to learning from other people's lived experience, given no-one represents all victim survivors. Recognising this, supervisors can reflect on and be mindful of how their own lived experience may shape or impact their supervision approach
- practitioner lived experience, whether historical or current, informs and influences supervisee knowledge and practice in both explicit and implicit ways<sup>127</sup>
- being the voice of lived experience can take an emotional toll and add to a practitioner's workload
- practitioners with lived experience are so much more than their experience of family violence or sexual assault and it is important not to over-generalise or attribute their responses as being due to their lived experience
- supervision is key in keeping track of progress and determining further support needs, particularly for practitioners working towards mandatory minimum qualifications
- workplaces need to ensure infrastructure required to support practitioners with lived experience includes accessible recruitment and induction processes, appropriate supervision structures, and supports including Family Violence Leave and an EAP equipped to provide family violence counselling<sup>128</sup>
- peer supervision and co-reflection<sup>129</sup> (which can occur in pairs or small groups) enables staff with lived experience to connect, learn from one another, build resilience and move towards goals
- workplace messaging, policies, and procedures, which include the voices of staff with lived experience, need to reflect the above.

**'I met with a new worker who, just before going on his first home visit to meet with an identified family violence perpetrator, shared with me that his father had been abusive. He expressed his concern that in meeting with this client, he (the social worker) might "go over the table at him" or freeze up. Because he was able to share with me these fears around "fight, flight or freeze", I was able to support him in bringing these concerns to his supervisor. I encouraged him to request that his supervisor accompany him on the home visit.'**

— David Mandel, Executive Director, Safe and Together model

Supervisors can provide support by recognising that:

- Lived experience is not only historical, but can also be current, with the impacts of family violence and sexual assault being ongoing or happening in real time. Practitioners will need understanding and support regarding this. Supervisors need to provide practitioners with choice and agency regarding next steps and they can refer to relevant policies regarding family violence leave and responding to family violence disclosures in the workplace.
- Sometimes practitioners can experience negative unconscious biases, judgement, and assumptions from colleagues after they share their lived experience. Supervision can provide space to discuss and address these underlying attitudes without fear of further backlash or judgement.
- The impacts of responding to family violence and sexual assault and working within the context of structural oppression and social injustice may bring up challenges or be traumatising for all practitioners, including those with lived experience. Supervisors need to be aware of these possibilities and assist practitioners to identify and make sense of what might be coming up for them in the workplace and take steps to engaging in external supports when required.
- Emotions are important sources of information and inform better case practice and decision making rather than a weakness.
- They need to 'walk alongside' their practitioners with lived experience and ask what support they require to set them up for success in the role.
- There needs to be discussions (and organisational guidelines) regarding the use of purposeful disclosure when working with clients. Supervision can be a useful forum to reflect on the reasons a practitioner believes it will benefit the client and to consider any unintended consequences that may arise.

**'When working with family violence victim survivors, ... I have to catch ... little Aliegha and reassure her it's okay, and we're not back there, and it's not our reality anymore. And we're in a different space. I have to do a bit of reparenting with myself in those moments. They (my inner child) pop up and I have to soothe them back down.'**

— Aliegha Manksi, Lived experience practitioner and Safe and Together certified trainer, Queensland<sup>130</sup>

# When supervision becomes tricky – relationship difficulties

Most supervisory relationships provide supportive and psychologically safe spaces for professional growth and deep reflection. But sometimes difficulties can arise, and supervision can become little more than ‘time to be endured’, with supervisees using strategies to avoid judgement.<sup>131</sup>

**‘Always lead with care and curiosity.’**

— Lisa Robinson, Executive Manager, Meli

## Setting up for success

Supervision can be set up for success by supervisors:

- adopting a collaborative stance with supervisees
- using open, curious questions and reflection to better understand the supervisee
- practising good communication, such as deep listening and using strengths-based questions
- providing regular feedback and feedforward so it becomes the relational and cultural norm
- messaging that supervision is about the supervisee’s development and success
- discussing practice concerns early rather than letting them build
- ‘talking about the talking’ in relation to raising uncomfortable issues and surfacing conflict
- naming the dynamics – observed or perceived – and naming them as such
- discussing one another’s go-to conflict styles, such as using avoidance strategies
- having an awareness of the impacts of negative stress on brain functioning in terms of being able to listen and make decisions
- adopting a trauma- and violence-informed framework to contextualise a supervisee’s behaviour
- reflecting upon and challenging their own unconscious biases and opinions.

Supervision can be set up for success by supervisees:

- attending their own supervision training or induction which outlines the various supervision models and functions, the purpose and benefits of reflective supervision and their role during supervision
- understanding their role and responsibility as ‘principal explorers’ during reflection<sup>132</sup>
- preparing material (such as deciding which case or issue they want to discuss) and preparing mentally for this
- taking ownership of their supervision needs
- adopting a partnership approach, where both parties are empowered to be active participants in supervision.<sup>133</sup>



Discussing a supervision agreement further sets up supervisory relationships for success. This can include discussion about:

- **expectations** – to align views on the purpose and functions of supervision, including reflection
- **comfort level** – how each party would like to handle disagreements and potential conflict
- **feedback/feedforward methods** – how each party would like to receive feedback or feedforward
- **supervisee wellbeing plans** – which can be attached to the supervision agreement (see Appendix for an example).

When considering how to provide feedback or feedforward, supervisors need to attend to process as much as content.<sup>134</sup> The supervisor seeking permission to be more challenging in any given scenario, can also be helpful.

Similarly, asking about the supervisee's supervision history can promote engagement. Learning what they found useful or not in previous supervisory relationships signals a willingness to get to know the supervisee and their preferences. Past negative supervisory experiences can create anxiety and taint the current one, so exploring the impact of this is useful.

## Why conflict arises

Conflict is a normal part of any relationship.

The attachment concept of 'rupture and repair' can be useful to consider.<sup>135</sup> This acknowledges that relationship disconnections frequently happen. When they do, some action needs to occur to restore relationship equilibrium and a sense of safety and connection. Ruptures can be 'wake-up' calls signalling that something needs to change. They can also indicate the relationship is reaching new depths which is a positive thing.<sup>136</sup>

Due to their greater positional power, the supervisor will often need to initiate the repair and reconnection.

There are various reasons why supervisory relationships can become difficult and fraught. Like any relationship, there can be misunderstandings or communication breakdowns. Sometimes expectations are not aligned, or a supervisee has experienced unhelpful supervision in the past.

Other factors include:

- imposter syndrome, where professionals doubt their skills and effectiveness and fear being found out. Supervisors and supervisees can feel at risk of exposure. This can lead to feelings of shame and fear, which in turn can be expressed as resistance and even hostility<sup>137</sup>
- set-up-to-fail syndrome, where supervisors unconsciously respond to minor performance concerns by increasing their monitoring and instructions towards the supervisee.<sup>138</sup> This then signals to the supervisee that their supervisor lacks confidence in them, resulting in an unhelpful and possibly damaging dynamic and the development of more significant performance issues
- parallel processes playing out within the supervisory relationship. This is a term often used in trauma-informed organisations to explain clinical dynamics playing out throughout a system. An example is the dynamic of power and control playing out within family violence work and then similar power and control themes occur between practitioners and management
- line managers, clinical and external supervisors have a different level of power to the supervisee, regardless of how relaxed and collaborative the agency or supervisor is. This can lead to supervisees reacting to any use of authority
- harmful supervision. This is defined as those 'situations where action or inaction on the part of the supervisor is known to cause harm'. It includes supervisors wanting to control practitioners and bullying<sup>139</sup>
- vicarious trauma, burnout and disillusion with the system and organisation, which can play out in the supervisory relationship.

## Responding to conflict

Supervisees need to experience a level of discomfort to be stretched. This is where the learning happens. The supervisor's role is to support and challenge the supervisee.<sup>140</sup> Yet, the balance between the two is tricky, especially in the context of family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing work and heightened levels of stress and anxiety.

It is important that supervisors take account of personal, professional, organisational and any sociocultural factors when trying to make sense of the supervisee's behaviour and challenging situations. For example, internalised rules from our family of origin or cultural background can influence attitudes regarding self-sufficiency and dependence, which may affect the supervisee's help-seeking behaviour.

When tension or conflict occurs, it is important to resist the temptation to attribute blame to the other person. Supervisors might find it helpful to speak with their own supervisor, a trusted colleague or EAP who will keep the information confidential. This allows discussion about the situation to gain perspective and ensure the supervisor can respond fairly and constructively.

Critically reflecting on the role of emotions, contributing factors and each party's role in the dynamic or interaction is beneficial. Such discussions can unpack whether unhelpful labels, assumptions or biases are creating interactions which have become 'stuck' and self-fulfilling.

Similarly, the supervisee might want to seek out colleagues or EAP to sort through their feelings and perspective as well. Discussing the tension or conflict is often required.

If the conflict persists, both parties might need to seek further support. Mediation is sometimes required by a third party. Occasionally, the supervisory relationship might break down and it is best for the supervisee to change supervisors. Messaging regarding this will be important to ensure blame is not attributed and the next supervisory relationship is set up for success.

## 'Working through conflicts and tensions to achieve a successful resolution should be a key goal of effective supervision.'

— Cousins, 2021<sup>141</sup>

## When performance concerns arise

Many supervisors report being uncertain on how best to support supervisees when they have concerns about the supervisee's level of insight, attitude, skill level and/or performance.<sup>142</sup>

These uncertainties can include:

- worrying about the supervisee's reaction and the potential impact on the supervisory relationship
- fearing the conversation will affect the supervisee's confidence
- not knowing what to do and how to make a positive difference
- lacking clarity about Human Resource processes and level of support that is available to them
- being accused of unfairness or discrimination
- feeling they are the only ones with the concern about the supervisee's practice
- worrying they will contribute to the supervisee's decision to leave the role – this is particularly relevant given current recruitment challenges.



Organisations need to be aware of these concerns and develop strategies to support supervisors.

If performance concerns persist, a performance development plan can clarify expectations and the professional development supports needed.

Supervisors can also use a bridging interview.<sup>143</sup> This is a step before formal performance management. Supervisors should check their organisation's formal performance management policies and procedures to ensure a bridging interview aligns with them.

The bridging interview is where the supervisor:

- describes their concerns using specific examples of behaviours or practice that needs to change
- listens to the supervisee's response and explanation – this includes being attuned to their emotional responses and responding in a way that helps the supervisee regulate
- considers the broader context which includes work–life impacts, team relationships, organisation and the wider system
- looks for desired alternatives by exploring whether it is a capability or a motivational issue
- develops a written, supportive plan with the supervisee about how you will work together to improve things.

Before undertaking the bridging interview, the supervisor needs to consider if there are any organisational constraints affecting practice and whether it reasonable to think the supervisee has the required knowledge and skill to perform their role. Other considerations include:

- Does the supervisee have a clear understanding of their role and responsibilities?
- Has the supervisee been provided sufficient support and mentoring?
- Have they been provided sufficient training?
- Are there signs of vicarious trauma and burnout impacting on practice?
- What future support or professional development does the supervisee need?



The bridging interview can be adapted to the situation and relationship, by using different approaches such as being directive, using coaching and being empathic. The interview contributes to the accountability requirements of the supervisory role and organisational responsibilities.

If change occurs, then this can be acknowledged. If not, the supervisor may need to consider performance management processes which are not a part of supervision.

# Supervision standards

## **Regular formal supervision with a trained and capable supervisor is important for staff wellbeing and practice development.**

Supervision needs and requirements will depend on the service setting. Most services will have their own policies setting out standards. Different sectors and professions also have their own standards for supervision, including the AASW *Supervision Standards 2014*, the CASA Forum *Standards of practice 2014*, the Safe and Equal *Code of practice: principles and standards for specialist family violence services for victim survivors 2020*, and the *Men's behaviour change minimum standards 2018*.

The following recommendations build on and align to the practice standards outlined above. They have been set following sector consultations and although they are not mandatory, provide a guide for minimum standards for best practice.



## **Supervision frequency and duration**

Regular, scheduled supervision is a requirement for funded family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing agencies and reflects best practice. Where possible, supervision should be scheduled for a minimum of 60 minutes at a time. It should take place in a private space away from distractions.

Family violence, sexual assault and child wellbeing work is complex and can be challenging. The frequency and duration of supervision should be matched to individual needs and the nature of the work. It may change over time in consultation between the supervisor and supervisee.

Supervision is a key method of building and sustaining the workforce, but the nature of the work means that supervision cannot always occur when planned. It is important to schedule supervision in advance and prioritise it. If a session does need to be cancelled, ensure it is rescheduled in addition to the next regularly scheduled session. Particularly for new practitioners, more frequent supervision is important to support wellbeing and confidence.<sup>144</sup>

While informal supervision is helpful to respond to immediate issues, providing scheduled, formal supervision is a better use of resources over time.<sup>145</sup>

Minimum recommendations for frequency are described below.

**Table 3: Recommended frequency and duration of supervision**

Level of experience	Recommended minimum requirements
<b>Students</b>	One hour of formal scheduled supervision a week, in addition to regular peer or group supervision, and weekly informal supervision and/or supervised practice.
<b>Graduates and new practitioners (less than six months' experience)</b>	One hour of formal scheduled supervision a week, in addition to regular informal supervision, peer or group supervision.
<b>More experienced practitioners (over six months' experience)</b>	One hour of formal scheduled supervision per fortnight, and a minimum of one hour of informal, peer or group supervision a month.
<b>Supervisors and managers</b>	Two hours of formal scheduled supervision per month and informal supervision as required.
<b>Senior executives, administration staff</b>	One hour of formal scheduled supervision quarterly, in addition to debriefing as required.

For part-time staff and staff who work additional hours, supervision frequency should follow the above guidance on a pro rata basis. Staff members who provide phone or web-based support to clients should receive the same amount of supervision as staff who offer face-to-face services.

For staff who work after-hours, supervision can follow the above guidance. However, staffing models and the nature/intensity of the work for after-hours services varies across organisations and supervision can be adjusted to reflect this. For example, organisations may provide more one-on-one supervision versus group supervision or vice versa, depending on what works for the organisation and supervisee.

In addition to supervision, organisations must have critical incident management processes in place. All staff, including after-hours staff, need access to formal debriefing as required. These need their own policies and procedures.

## Supervisor to supervisee ratio

The recommended maximum ratio of supervisors to supervisees is one supervisor to a maximum of six to eight supervisees, where supervision is provided internally. The ratio depends on the complexity of the work and type of role, and as well as the workload of the supervisor. The ratio should be adapted to suit the work context, including the caseloads of the supervisees.

## Supervisor training and capability

It is important for supervisors to build the capabilities to provide supervision that meets the needs of their supervisees. Supervision should be provided by experienced practitioners who have relevant experience in the field of practice. Supervisors should generally have at least two to three years of practice experience before becoming a supervisor.

Supervisors should complete an industry-recognised foundational supervision training course within three months of commencing their supervisor role. This should be one-day training at a minimum.

Supervisors should also commit to continuous professional development to ensure their supervision skills continue to reflect best practice and benefit their supervisees. Supervisors should attend advanced supervision training after two years of working as a supervisor.

Supervision can be complex at times. Supervisors support their supervisees through ethical dilemmas, conflicts and practice challenges. Supervision may also bring up personal or emotional issues for the supervisor. All supervisors should receive their own supervision. They should also have access to an EAP, as required.

New supervisors should be supported into the role. Access to a network of peers, shadowing, mentoring and broader support and professional development is important to sustain and retain supervisors.

Refer to the section on 'Support and development of supervisors' for further details on supporting supervisors in their roles.

## Supervision notes

All formal supervision sessions should be recorded via supervision notes. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to ensure supervision notes are kept. The supervisor and supervisee can negotiate who will write and maintain supervision notes with the option of this being a shared responsibility. However, supervision notes should be transparent and made available to the supervisee, so that both the supervisor and supervisee can author and agree to the record.

Taking notes during supervision should not detract from being fully present and engaged with the supervisee. This is reportedly a constant challenge. Just as with casework practice, which focuses on engagement, use key words to document what was covered.

Confidentiality and privacy during supervision is important, except where legislation requires otherwise. Supervisors must ensure they maintain the privacy and confidentiality of their supervisees and peers. During supervision, clients' confidentiality should also be maintained.

Case material should be de-identified, unless the client provides written, informed consent or through agreement with the supervisor in accordance with legislation or organisational policies.<sup>146</sup>

For more details about confidentiality, refer to the AASW *Supervision standards 2014*.



## Further reading

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# Glossary

**Authoritarian supervision** – controlling, inflexible and focused on outputs. Uses a ‘do what I say’ approach.

**Authoritative supervision** – visionary, respectful and motivating. Uses a ‘come with me’ approach.

**Critical reflection** – an ongoing commitment for people to challenge themselves by examining beliefs, biases, values and thinking. This commitment enables people to be open to learning from all perspectives. It also allows them to release unexamined assumptions and acknowledge their own power and privilege.

**Communities of practice (CoPs)** – groups of professionals who ‘share a concern or passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.’<sup>147</sup> Each CoP is based on a theme. CoPs facilitate social learning and professional development. They also provide a forum for members to innovate and solve problems in a way that can provide a collective and strategic voice.<sup>148</sup> CoPs can be open or closed groups of professionals who meet or communicate to discuss and workshop specific topics.

**Compassion satisfaction** – level of satisfaction people working in ‘helping’ professions find in their job and the degree they feel successful in their job,<sup>149</sup> which can improve practice and reduce burnout.

**Counter transference** – refers to the feelings and behaviours evoked in the supervisor by the supervisee’s transference. The supervisor then reacts accordingly in line with their unconscious scripts and unresolved issues.

**Co-vision** – where the supervisee reaches a level of knowledge and competency that makes them more like equals with the supervisor. The supervisor can acknowledge this and be curious about what this means in terms of the power balance and each other’s expectations.<sup>150</sup>

**Critical but mindful friend** – the words ‘but mindful’ have been added to indicate this is about supporting supervisees to critique their own work, with the supervisor being the supervisee’s ally. Someone who can be counted on to have the supervisee’s back rather than someone who forms a friendship.<sup>151</sup>

**Cultural load** – refers to multiple elements of stress, pressure and obligation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners can experience in their professional roles that lie outside the normal boundaries and expectations of other health professionals. This can include the often-unrecognised expectation to provide indigenous knowledge, education, and support to other practitioners; cultural obligations to client family members within community that involve support outside normal hours; experiencing racism or unintended cultural ignorance or assumptions in the workplace that needs to be addressed and which take an emotional toll; and dealing with intergenerational trauma such as lateral violence within community.

**Feedforward** – focusing on future behaviour, which can be more powerful and better received than feedback.

**Intergenerational trauma** – when unresolved individual or collective trauma is transferred to the next generation.

**Lateral violence** – where, due to oppression, members of marginalised groups may strike out at each other. The oppressed become the oppressors of themselves and each other.

**Lived experience in the workforce** – refers to individuals who work in the sector as practitioners, leaders, advisors, researchers, administrators, clinicians and in many other roles, who have experienced family violence or sexual assault, have experience of using the system or have supported someone close to them directly impacted by family violence or sexual assault.

Lived experiences can be intersectional and people will bring different insights gained through experiences of overlapping systems of discrimination and oppressions. Lived experiences of patriarchal violence are compounded by colonisation, racism and white supremacy, ableism, ageism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia, among others.<sup>152</sup>

**Neglectful supervision** – where the supervisor is often unavailable and uncaring, resulting in the supervisee becoming anxious and unclear on their role. This type of supervision is neither demanding nor responsive to the supervisees needs.

**Parallel process** – recognises that there is a parallel between the traumatic symptoms we see in clients and those we see in organisations. This can result in organisations and workforces becoming insular, distrusting, rigid, risk averse and hierarchical. A shift in behaviours and thinking which align to values can shift this culture.<sup>153</sup>

**Permissive supervision** – is unfocused, providing the supervisee too much autonomy. The supervisor sometimes addresses supervisee's emotional needs at the expense of focusing on case practice. This can result in the supervisee operating in isolation, or conversely, becoming overly dependent upon the supervisor. Issues are often unaddressed, and cases lack direction.

**Principal explorer** – where the supervisee leads the exploration, and the supervisor is the skilled companion during reflective supervision. The supervisor helps the supervisee to find their own wisdom rather than giving advice or problem-solving.<sup>154</sup>

**Privilege** – an advantage, right or benefit, that is given to some people and not to others. This benefit is often in the form of power society gives to certain people based on characteristics like, gender, race, ability, class, education and sexuality.

**Transference** – refers to the feelings from past events or relationships that are projected onto the current relationships. For example, the power dynamic in supervision may bring up the supervisee's unresolved issues related to family of origin. The person then responds as though they are in that previous relationship. Managers, of course, also bring their own transference issues and need to be aware of the feelings and relationship dynamics from the past that may surface in their work relationships.

**Transgenerational trauma** – when trauma is transferred across several generations.

**Trauma aware** – understanding the impacts and responses to trauma which includes symptoms and behaviours.

**Trauma responsive** – practitioners apply knowledge of trauma and resilience in their practice and apply the trauma-informed principles.

**Trauma sensitive** – the organisation values a trauma-informed lens and promotes a safe and respectful environment that enables staff to build caring relationships, self-regulate their emotions and behaviours and do their best work.

**Vicarious resilience** – relates to practitioners and supervisors feeling a sense of purpose by noticing the effects of their practice on clients' ability to cope with adversity.

**Vicarious trauma** – refers to the experience of trauma that stems from indirectly living the experiences, thoughts, and emotions of those undergoing or recounting traumatic events.

**Window of tolerance** – describes the best state of 'arousal' in which people can function. When people are regulated in between the arousal states of hyper- (high arousal state) and hypo-dissociative- (or low arousal state) arousal they can effectively manage and cope with their emotions and think more clearly.

# Appendix

Feel free to use and adapt the following examples for your own context.



## Scheduled or one-on-one supervision agreement example

### Supervision agreement between [supervisor] and [supervisee]

This agreement sets the scene for how we will work together and what works for each another.

*Note: If the supervisee is new to the field, the supervisor will need to explain the purpose of supervision, confidentiality (including limits to this) and the supervision model your agency uses.*

- What supervisory style works best for the supervisee? (Supervisee to share previous supervisory history and relationship experiences. What worked or did not work?)
- What expectations do we have of supervision and each other? (For example, how often we will meet, how long we will meet for, where we will meet, we will be on time, we will commit to our supervision sessions, we will be emotionally present etc.)
- How does the supervisee like to receive feedback – both positive/constructive – or feedforward (focus on future behaviour)?
- How does the supervisor like to receive feedback or feedforward?
- As the supervisee develops, how can they indicate they want more of a coaching style (where supervisor asks reflective questions) rather than a directive/mentoring (where supervisor leads by example, advises) approach?
- What shall we do when we notice signs of transgressing boundaries of enmeshment or disconnection as a way of coping with the work?
- How will we discuss the use of power in our work and within the supervisory relationship?
- How will we develop relationships based upon 'power with' rather than 'power over'?
- Conflict is a normal part of any relationship. What shall we do when the relationship is ruptured or is not working, and how will we communicate this with one another?
- What are our respective go-to conflict styles (such as using avoidance strategies or going quiet)?
- What methods will we use to resolve or repair any difficulties in working together?
- How will we ensure supervision is trauma- and violence-informed?
- How do we want to structure supervision to ensure we cover the four functions – supportive, managerial, systemic, developmental? What questions might frame this?
- When we do not cover all four functions in our session or arrangement, what should we do to ensure we do not lose sight of the missing ones?
- How do we make sure supervision is reflective, covering the four phases of the learning cycle (what happened – experience; feelings and reactions regarding what happened – reflection; how we made sense of what happened – analysis; and what to do next – action) when discussing our work?
- How will we incorporate discussions about cultural safety?
- How will we incorporate discussions about intersectional feminism with our case practice, systemic advocacy, justice-doing and how these impact on our relationship?
- How will we incorporate safety/self-care and team-care plans into supervision and this agreement?
- How will we document these sessions and jointly sign the session notes?

**Date agreement is to be reviewed:**

**Date:**

**Signed:**

[Supervisor]

[Supervisee]



## Peer or group supervision agreement example

This agreement describes how we will work together as a group.<sup>55</sup> It may be useful to complete this collectively at the beginning of the group and revisit it at the start of each session.

**Supervisor/facilitator name:** [this may not be needed for peer supervision]

**Supervisees' names/group members:**

### Group set-up

- For example, how frequently will you meet, for how long, and where?
- For peer supervision, who is responsible for organising and preparing for the sessions, noting that the chair could be rotated?
- Is this a closed or open group?

### Confidentiality

- For example, what is said in the group remains in the group.
- What are the limits of confidentiality?

### Peer or group supervision goals

- What are the functions of the group? For example, reflective supervision. Refer to the section on 'supervision models' for further details about the four functions of supervision.
- What are the shared goals of the group? For example, to promote critical reflection, to support wellbeing, to support consistency and best practice.
- What will be discussed? For example, case studies, debriefing, sharing positive outcomes and achievements.

### Ways of working

- What are our expectations of one another? For example, being on time, respectful listening, turning phones off, preparing for supervision etc.
- What are our shared values?
- How can we apply an intersectional feminist lens to the group, be culturally responsive and create a space where all group members are comfortable to share if they want to?
- How do we want to give and receive feedback or feedforward?
- How will we respond if/when conflict arises?
- How will we know if the group is meeting people's needs? How will we let others know so everyone assumes responsibility for making it better?

### Record keeping

- Who will capture/record notes?
- What is the purpose in keeping notes?
- Where will they be stored?

**Date agreement is to be reviewed:**

**Date:**

**Signed:**

[Group members]



## Supervisee wellbeing plan example

### To be developed, and reviewed every six months, during formal supervision.

Prioritising our wellbeing does not just happen, especially for those in the 'helping' professions. It needs to be planned for. A wellbeing plan is a list of things we can do to regulate our emotions and soothe our nervous systems when feeling overwhelmed. They focus on self and collective care.

Safety includes physical, psychological, social and moral elements. For our brains to think rationally and remain regulated, we need to feel sufficiently safe with each other and safe within our organisations. This means we need to use a whole-of-organisation trauma- and violence-informed wellbeing focus.

Supervisee wellbeing plans reinforce that:

- vicarious trauma and work-related stress are normal and to be expected
- we can learn to regulate our emotions and it is okay and important to seek the support of others
- we need longer-term self-care plans to deal with cumulative impacts of the work.

**When I don't take good care of myself, I notice the following impacts on my life, health, relationships and work:**

**When I take good care of myself, I notice the following impacts on my life, health, relationships and work:**

**Identify which emotions are most difficult to manage for you (note that there are often other emotions underneath anger, such as sadness, shame and frustration):**

**Identify what types of situations are likely to lead to emotions you identified (such as being ignored, being asked to do more than your share etc.):**

**Identify the signs that you or those around you notice when your emotions are becoming overwhelming (such as being tearful, fidgeting, pacing, talking fast, becoming irritable):**

**Identify five things you can do to help keep yourself regulated.** This can include seeking support from other people and needs to include two things you can do on your own without leaving the physical space you are in (such as deep breathing, squeezing your hands, using a special mantra, or telling yourself to calm down):

**Who can you 'howl at the moon'<sup>156</sup> with, who won't call a mental health check, pathologise you or try to rescue you from this work?**

**The following people, places or activities help ground me and bring me comfort:**

**Identify five strategies for self-care and state how frequently you will do these.** These can be separate to work. Note that exercise is one of the best ways to break down the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline:

Adapted from Safety Plans by Sandra Bloom<sup>157</sup> and Self-care plans by Jenny Dwyer<sup>158</sup>

## Team care plan example

### To be developed and reviewed every six months during team meetings.

Prioritising our wellbeing does not just happen, especially for those in the helping professions. It needs to be planned for.

A team care plan is a reflective exercise. It lists things we can do to better understand one another and enhance relationships. It focuses on self and collective care, and is used together with individual supervision wellbeing plans.

Safety includes physical, psychological, social and moral elements. For our brains to think rationally and remain regulated, we must feel sufficiently safe with each other and safe enough within our organisations. This means we need to use a whole-of-organisation trauma- and violence-informed wellbeing focus.

Team care plans reinforce that:

- vicarious trauma and work-related stress are normal and to be expected
- we can learn to regulate our emotions and it is ok and important to seek the support of others
- collective care is crucial to our work
- we need plans to assist us with cumulative impacts of the work.

**When we do not take good care of one another, we notice the following impacts on our life, energy levels, health, relationships, and work:**

**When we do take good care of one another, we notice the following impacts on our life, energy levels, health, relationships, and work:**

**Identify which emotions are most difficult to manage for us (note that there are often other emotions underneath what looks like anger, such as sadness, shame and frustration):**

**Identify what types of situations are likely to lead to emotions you identified (such as being ignored, being asked to do more than your share etc.):**

**Identify the signs** that you or those around you notice when your emotions are becoming overwhelming (such as being tearful, fidgeting, pacing, talking fast, becoming irritable):

**What do we do when we notice our colleagues transgress boundaries<sup>159</sup>** and become either enmeshed (the hero) or disconnected (the victim) from their clients and work? How do we bring them back to the zone where our best work can occur?

**Who can we ‘howl at the moon’<sup>160</sup>** with, who won’t call a mental health check, pathologise us or try to rescue us from this work?:

**Identify five things** we can do to support one another more:

**When we are starting to transgress these boundaries** how do we want others to let us know they have noticed changes and support us?

**What do we need from the broader program area** or organisation to support our wellbeing?

Adapted from Safety Plans by Sandra Bloom<sup>161</sup> and Self-care plans by Jenny Dwyer<sup>162</sup>

# Tip sheet

## Inviting feedback from supervisees

**Supervisees can be reluctant to provide feedback or feedforward to their supervisor due to the power imbalance. Inviting feedback helps develop a culture where this becomes a part of relationships and supervision practice.**

There will be aspects of supervision that are working well and other aspects that can be improved. The following questions elicit supervisee's perceptions of the supervisory process and relationship. These questions are collaborative and emphasise joint responsibility for making supervision effective.

What is working well for you in supervision and what things do you think we could improve?

In thinking about the four functions of supervision (managerial, development, support and systemic), which do we do well? Which do we need to do more of, or improve?

Do you feel supervision is providing a conduit for your voice to be heard with management? (This relates to the systemic function.) How could this be improved?

How could we make supervision more reflective, ensuring we cover the four phases of the learning cycle?

Are we reflecting enough on your relationship with community, families and clients?

Do I allow enough time to discuss your feelings and reactions to the work?

Do I allow for expressions of anxieties and fears? Do we celebrate your achievements enough?

Are we including enough theory and research in our supervision sessions? How could we use theory more in supervision? What frameworks and knowledge have been most helpful for your learning?

How well has supervision suited your learning style? Have I adapted my supervisory style as you grow and develop?

Are we including discussions and reflections regarding diversity, power structures, cultural safety and feminist intersectionality – from both the program/organisational perspective and practice?

How could we do more systemic advocacy and justice-doing (based on Vikki Reynold's work) within supervision and the team?

How well do we manage disagreements, uncertainty, and difficult conversations?

How can we tell if we are meeting your supervision goals?

What advice would you give to somebody on how to get the best from me as a supervisor?

What advice would you give to somebody on how to get the best from you as a supervisee?

How helpful, or unhelpful, has the feedback/feedforward in supervision been?

As your supervisor, what strengths or areas of your practice do you think I know well?  
What areas do I need to know more about?

Is supervision assisting you to feel more sustained, enthusiastic, and confident about the work?

Adapted from Wonnacott, 2012<sup>163</sup> and Department of Human Services, 2014<sup>164</sup>



# Endnotes

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- 9 G Ruch, 'Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: holistic approaches to contemporary child-care social work', *Child and Family Social Work*, 2005, 10(2): 111–123, doi:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2005.00359.x.
- 10 State of Victoria, *2019–20 census of workforces that intersect with family violence: survey findings report – specialist family violence response workforce*, Victorian Government website, 2021, accessed 27 February 2023.
- 11 Ruch, 'Relationship-based practice and reflective practice: holistic approaches to contemporary child-care social work'.
- 12 Note that the word supervision can have negative connotations of control and regulation for the First Nations workforce.
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