

What is Supervision?

In this article, I seek to convey the importance of clinical supervision to both newer and potential members of our profession, while underlining the relevance of supervision to counsellors who are longstanding members of our profession.

Supervision involves the meeting together of two counselling professionals, one of whom (the 'supervisor') has more experience than the other, to facilitate the development of the supervisee. The main purpose of receiving supervision is to ensure competent practice, and is therefore a method of ensuring quality and consistency. In supervision, the needs, goals and growth of the client are at the forefront. Secondly, but remaining of significant importance, is the supervisor's role in helping the supervisee to develop personally as a counsellor. This aspect may include interpersonal work (how the supervisee relates to others) and intrapersonal work related to insight (emotional and cognitive awareness of what has not previously been known about the self). Thirdly, supervision becomes a place of safety, where the emotional effects of clinical work can be expressed and debriefed, having the effect of psychologically unburdening oneself. Supervision provides the opportunity to develop skills and understanding, and provides an avenue for comparing different approaches to managing and conceptualising client problems. Supervision has as its focus the tasks and responsibilities of people-helping professions, supervisors help their supervisees to develop *therapeutic competence*, which term reflects ability in a variety of skills and processes. Therapeutic competence is described as:

...the habitual and judicious use of communication, knowledge, technical skills, clinical reasoning, emotions, values, and reflection in daily practice for the benefit of the individual and the community being served' (Epstein and Hundert in Falender & Schafranske 2004, p. 5).

Part of clinical wisdom is reflection on practice. Supervision provides the reflective space in which to ponder the complexities of counselling practice, within a supportive relationship.

Finding a Supervisor: what (and who!) to look for...

Professional associations often list supervisors who have met selected criteria for practice as supervisors. Here are some things to look for:

- **Qualifications:** as a counsellor and a supervisor. Many supervisors have completed a supervisory training course at post-graduate level.
- **Experience:** does the supervisor have experience beyond your own; is the supervisor experienced in the areas of your interest/expertise?
- **Insurance:** is the supervisor indemnified for supervisory practice?
- **Availability:** will the supervisor make him/herself available for between-session crises as well as for regular appointments?
- **Affordability:** it may be worth spending a little more to obtain the most qualified and experienced supervision.

As with any helping relationship, supervision is most effective when there is a degree of rapport between the supervisor and supervisee. When interviewing a potential supervisor, do you feel comfortable with this person? Is there a balance between professionalism and relational warmth? Do you know others who have worked with this supervisor and would recommend him/her?

Types of supervision

Individual: one-on-one. Session duration of around one hour. Recommended for counsellors in their first years of practice as an effective way to support emerging competence, and thereafter at a reducing ratio of client sessions to supervisory sessions as expertise increases.

Group: usually consists of an experienced counsellor and two or more members who are at approximately the same level in training and experience. Duration varies depending on size of the group, can be from an hour to two hours. Group supervision is useful in expanding knowledge, gaining from the experience of others, learning different ways to conceptualize cases, and learning from group dynamics.

Peer: two or more colleagues having a similar experience level who meet together to discuss clinical work. Peer supervision works well for experienced practitioners, and is not recommended for counsellors prior to Clinical Membership levels (minimum 750 post graduate counselling hours, plus 75 hours of supervision, plus demonstration of competent counselling practice).

Mentoring and Supervision

At the time when supervision is most needed by the counsellor, i.e. in the earlier stages of clinical practice, it tends to be least affordable. Supervision is an essential component of counsellor development, professional accountability, and competent practice, it cannot be omitted. However, there are relationships which may act as a supplement (although never a replacement) for supervision, fulfilling some of the tasks of the supervisory relationship. Mentoring has some similar characteristics to the supervisory relationship, but there are significant differences:

- Mentoring is structured around mentee needs, goals and growth, rather than client needs, goals and growth. Mentoring has as its primary focus the personal development of the mentee.
- Mentoring is less formal than supervision
- The mentor or mentee may initiate the mentoring relationship
- Mentoring is time-limited (6 or 12 months)
- Mentoring emphasizes learning, awareness and character as adjuncts to the development of clinical wisdom.

Mentoring does not replace supervision, and must always be in addition to supervision once the mentee is engaged in counselling. The mentoring relationship may prepare the pre-professional counsellor for the supervisory relationship. If a supervisory relationship is contemplated with the mentor, a separate contract must be entered into. Christian Counsellors Association (South Australia) offers limited mentoring opportunities to Associate or Graduate members within our State.

Supervision and Counselling

The supervisory relationship may raise awareness in the supervisee of the need for personal counselling, or the supervisor may suggest that the supervisee might benefit from counselling. To avoid potential conflict, it is recommended that the supervisee seek counselling outside of the supervisory relationship.

Reference: Falender, CA & Shafranske, EP 2004, *Clinical supervision a competency based approach*, American Psychological Association, Washington,DC.