

“Like giving a tool box to a chimpanzee”

When supervision goes
wrong – and what we can do
about it

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Half-full or
half-empty?



Every cloud
has a silver
lining



Supervision is
too-often
process driven

‘Inadequate’ authority improving despite ‘process driven’ social work supervision

Inspectors noted that significant financial investment in children’s services enabled leaders to make change from a low base

Council criticised over supervision that ‘rarely challenges poor practice’

‘Inadequate’ council has made slow progress to improve services, inspectors have said

Supervision is too-often process driven



“Supervision is process-driven”

“Training has not improved the quality of supervision”

“Supervision focuses on process compliance and task completion and rarely challenges poor practice”

Self-report surveys

“...day-to-day supervision practice...frequently fell well short of national standards...sessions typically focused predominantly on case management, with much less attention paid to the worker and opportunities for them to reflect on their practice. Only a quarter of social workers said they were satisfied with their current supervision”

Turner-Daly and Jack, 2017

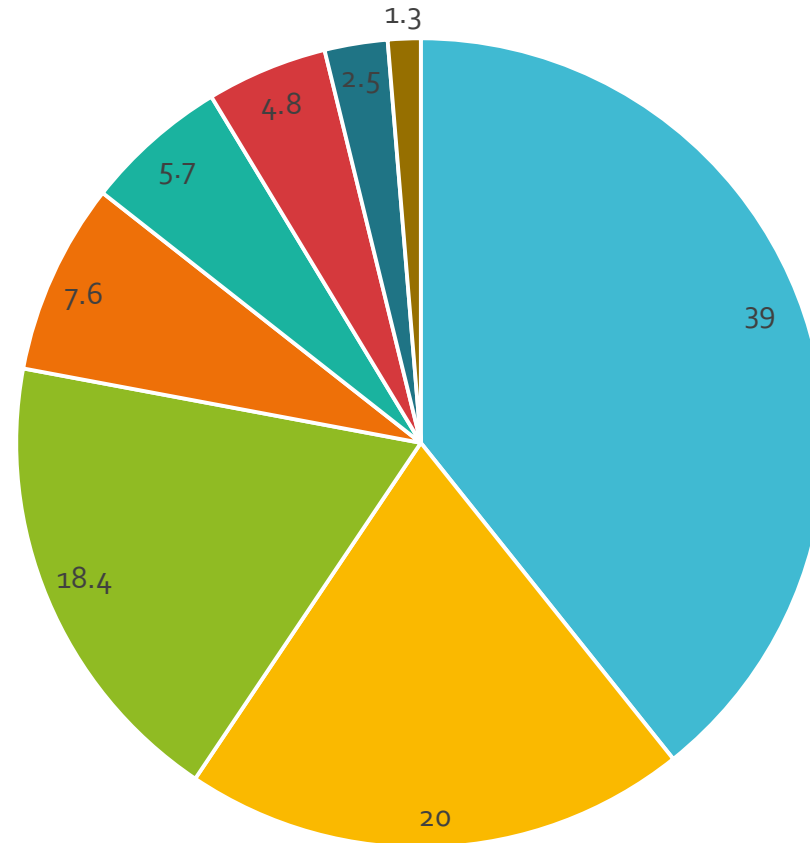
Self-report surveys

“Social workers...regretted the fact that their supervision was dominated by case management, action planning and targets and they...called for a process which included the opportunity to reflect, develop, learn and unburden”

Baginsky, Moriarty, Manthorpe, Stevens, MacInnes and Nagendran, 2010

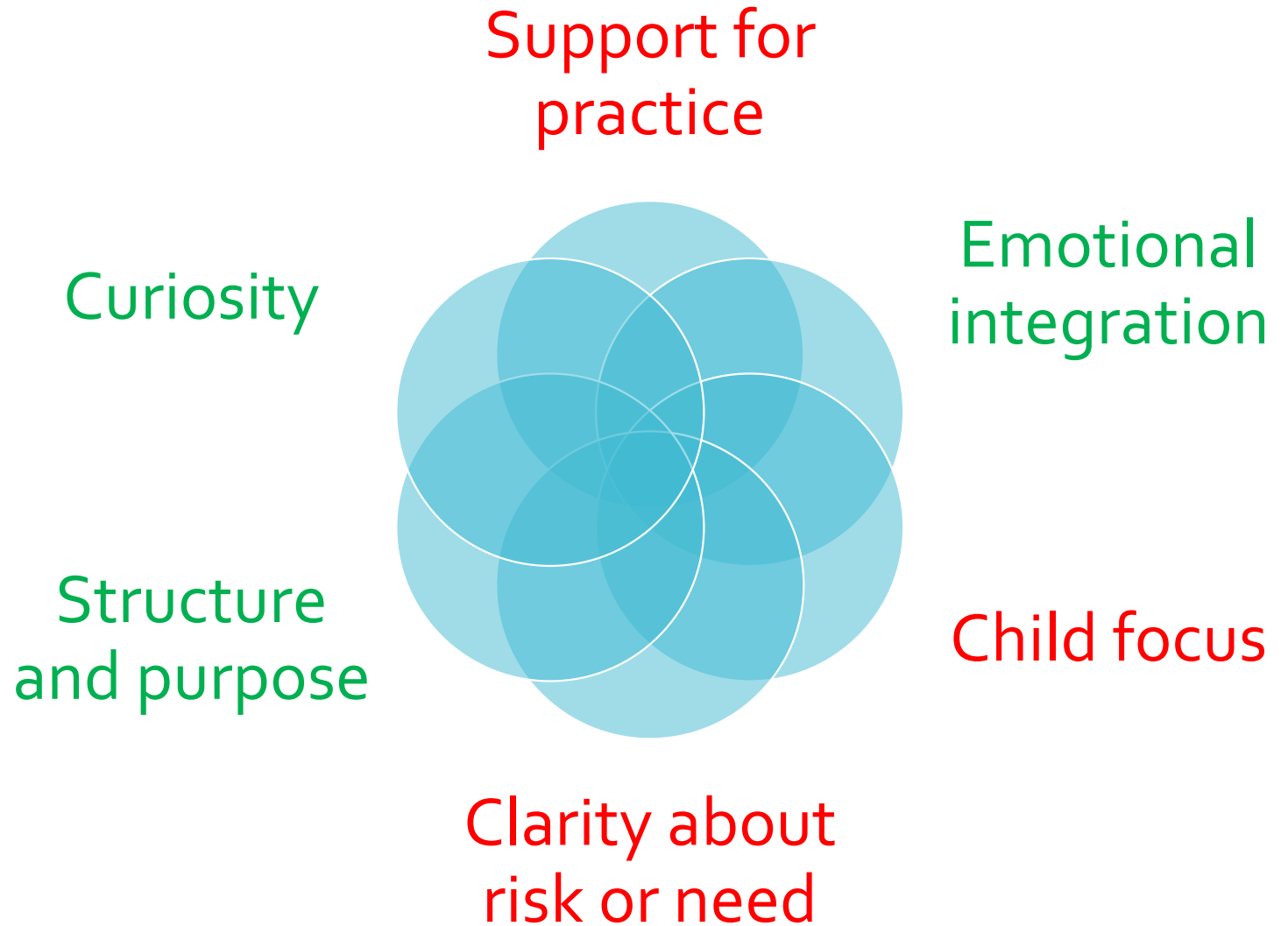
Self-report surveys

What does supervision help with? A survey of 315 social workers.



- Management oversight
- Task clarity
- Timescales
- None of these things
- Other
- Analysis and reflection
- Emotional support
- Quality of direct practice

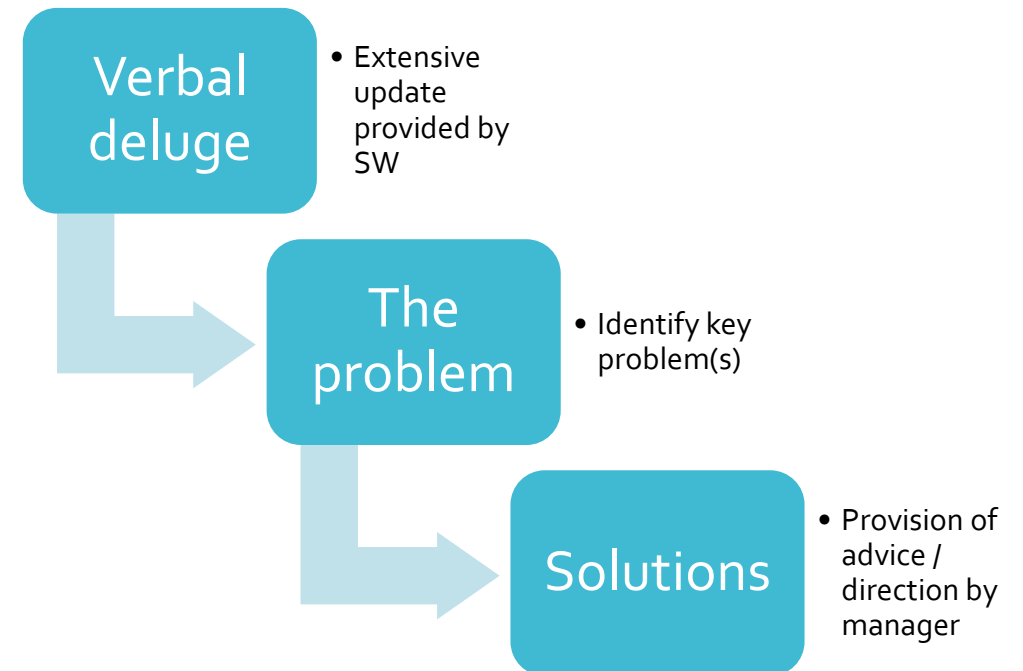
What are the
qualities of
good
supervision in
Children's
Services?



What about in 'good' authorities?

We observed more than 100 hours of supervision across several English authorities, most of which were 'good'.

Supervisors did lots and lots of things to support workers and practice – but there was also a degree of consistency:



What about in 'good' authorities?

- *M: How many times have you seen them?*
- *SW: I've seen Tommy three times, no four times*
- *M: And you've seen Billy?*
- *SW: Yes...but he isn't talking. On my second visit, I asked Nan to let him know I was coming but I had to speak to him only through a locked door*
- *M: So where he is? You're in the living room and he's where?*
- *SW: No, this was the bathroom door. He was in the bathroom and I said I could come back at another time and he said 'no'.*
- *M: So you haven't asked him about attending college?*
- *SW: I haven't asked him about anything.*
- *M: Does he speak to other professionals?*
- *SW: I'm not sure, probably not*
- *M: So the key is to have a CIN meeting and see who else might be talking to him. Ok, anything else?*

What about in
'good'
authorities?



Why does this happen?

1. Confusion about purpose (who or what is supervision for)
2. Prioritising management oversight
3. A system that monitors (managers, workers and families) rather than supports (managers, workers and families)

Improving supervision with training



Local authorities love to send people on training courses

Lots of people love to attend training courses

But training does not work (to sustainably change behaviour in practice)

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What helps?

- Supervision -> Practice -> Outcomes
(Shulman, 1982)
- Striking the right balance between retrospective and prospective discussion
- Gaining more experience does not necessarily = expertise
- Lots of people drive for years without becoming world-class drivers

What helps?

- Doing something without thinking about it, without challenge and without feedback is not practice.
- But reflection and introspective learning is also insufficient.
- Development does not occur by doing something and then thinking about it.
- It happens by doing something, getting feedback, planning for next time, doing again, noticing what's different and repeat.
- Focus on output and outcome, not input.

What helps?

- “You can’t do much carpentry with your bare hands, and you can’t do much thinking with your bare brain” (Bo Dahlbom)