

Talking about emotions in supervision



DAVID WILKINS

**SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW, TILDA
GOLDBERG CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF
BEDFORDSHIRE**

Plan for the Workshop



- What, when, why and how
- Supervision as practice leadership
- Focusing on the emotional content of the work
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Bringing emotions into supervision

What, When, Why and How



Supervision as an opportunity to engage workers in collaborative problem-solving

Supervision involves thinking about / talking about:

- What
- When
- Why
- How

And we (as a profession) have not focussed enough on how to do the last two...

What, When, Why and How



- Supervisor or practice leader?
- Line managers are responsible for the quality of practice of those they supervise
 - What do you think of this idea? Are you? Should you be?
 - How do you currently shape the quality of practice of your workers?

Conventional Approach to Supervision



- Meeting staff regularly
- Discussing cases
- Finding out WHAT they have done
- Agreeing what they will do next and when
- Bit of “HR stuff” including setting aims, etc.

Conventional Approach to Supervision



A “Definition”:

“Supervision is the process through which managers and staff communicate with each other to ensure that they are properly equipped and supported to discharge their duties and responsibilities to the required standard within their working agreement.”

Fox (2011) – using Morrison’s work

Conventional Approach to Supervision



Key Elements

Management = organisational and operational tasks, monitoring of role and responsibilities, outcomes for service users

Development = identifying and enabling worker to continue to build skills and knowledge in their practice to improve service user outcomes

Support = paying attention to the worker as an individual, acknowledging the impact of secondary trauma from the workplace, acknowledging impact of home life/health on work functioning

Mediation = ensuring that the individual and the organisation are congruent in terms of values, aims, task and function

Conventional Aims of Supervision



- To ensure staff are clear about their role and responsibilities
- To ensure staff are meeting the organisations objectives
- To develop a positive climate for good practice
- To help staff to develop
- To reduce stress
- To ensure staff are given the resources to do their jobs
- To ensure that work is planned and purposeful, and that progress is regularly monitored

Supervision as Practice Leadership



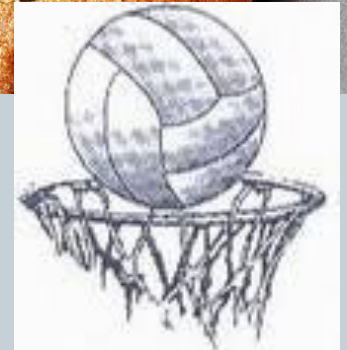
What do sports coaches do?



- Overall goal – the style of play they want to see
- Assess individual skills and character
- Individualised goals and plans
- Observe practice
- Gather statistics - invaluable
- Training sessions linked to the above

- Social work is obviously NOT a sport... but... how do people become good at stuff?

How to master any skill?



Supervision as Practice Leadership



Supervisors have a key responsibility for:

- the quality of practice of the workers they supervise
- the welfare of the workers they supervise
- The professional development of staff they supervise.

Supervision is one of the key forums for discharging these three responsibilities.

A key focus is on the What, When, *Why* and *How* of practice

What and **when** only make sense in relation to **why** and **how**

Focusing on the Emotional Content of the Work



- Why do we do this?
- Social work is very stressful – 30-45% of workers “at risk” of depression or anxiety; very high staff turnover
- Almost every child death has involved a worker who is stressed and unsupported
- We have emotional responses to families – and they influence assessment and how we help people
- So how can we ensure good emotional support AND putting emotions into the analysis?

How do we do this?



NOT by asking the
worker how they are in
every session in a
formulaic way....

Three elements



- Looking after the worker
- Including the worker's feelings in analysis
- Looking after the supervisor

What do you need to do your job well?



- In small groups:
- What do you need to do your job well?
- How do you cope with the emotional impact of the work?
- What might be helpful that currently does not happen (or does not happen enough)?

Introducing Appreciative Inquiry



- **Appreciative Inquiry** (AI) is a change management approach that focuses on identifying what is working well, analyzing why it is working well and then doing more of it.
- The basic tenet of AI is that an organization – or an individual - will grow in whichever direction people focus their attention.
- This can be seen as an approach to social work practice, supervision and organisational change

Appreciative Inquiry Role Play



- In pairs with someone you do not usually work with
- For 5 minutes explore:
 - What have you done in the last week at work that you are most proud of?
 - ✦ Use open questions, affirmations, reflections and summaries
 - What learning can you take from this?

After 5 minutes, the listener will then summarise:

- What I have learnt about your strengths from this

Appreciative Inquiry Role Play



- How did it feel to be on the receiving end?
- Is that something you could do in supervision?
- What might it achieve?

Bringing Emotions Into Supervision



Bringing Emotions Into Supervision



- There is no one way of doing this – it is much more about actively creating space to talk about the emotional content of the work
- Here is one way it might be approached:
- Asking supervisee to identify the family or child they find most difficult to work with
- Actively listening to all the reasons why this is so – WITHOUT JUDGING OR PROBLEM SOLVING
- THEN asking them to think what
 - (a) they need to do to work well with this family and
 - (b) what you could do that might help

Bringing Emotions Into Supervision



- Exercise: In pairs (with someone you do not usually work closely with)
- A “supervisor” and a “supervisee”
- 8 minutes
- Ask supervisee to identify the worker or family or problem they find most difficult to work with
- Actively listening to all the reasons why this is so – WITHOUT JUDGING OR PROBLEM SOLVING (AI)
 - Open questions, affirmations, reflections, summaries
- THEN asking them to think what they need to do to work well with this worker/family

I mean, the very fact that
you've scheduled my supervision
at the end of the day
suggests to me that you
don't take it seriously.



Clare?

Go on, go on,
I'm listening.



Final activity (if we have time...)



- A coding framework for good supervision (a description of what ‘good’ sounds like)
- Three elements so far:
 - Child or client focus
 - Clarity about risk and need
 - Support for practice (coaching)
- Three elements in development :
 - Respectful curiosity (reflection and analysis)
 - Structure and purpose
 - Emotional integration (not support)

Final activity



- Example (clarity about risk or need):

Low on scale

Issues or concerns barely mentioned

Lack of curiosity

Not clear what needs to happen

Not related to child/YP

Risk is static not dynamic

Prevalant labelling

No attempt to prioritise

One view of risk only

Harm not mentioned

Moderate on scale

Issues or concerns discussed

Some curiosity

Process-based change

Some link to child/YP

Some reference to change

Some labelling

Some attempt to prioritise

One view of risk dominates

Harm mentioned

High on scale

In-depth discussion of issues or concerns

Extensive curiosity

Practice or relationship-based change

Related to child/YP

Severity and change

Clear bottom line

Clear priority

Other views of risk

Past and future harm

Final activity



- What would a description of low / moderate / good look like for ‘emotional integration’?
- On your tables (5 – 10 minutes), what words, phrases, etc., would you want to see included under each heading?