University of Bedfordshire

Tilda Goldberg Centre for social work and social care

The relationship between Supervision and Practice

Dr Lisa Bostock and Louis Patrizio

The importance of supervision for social work practice is one of the most widely accepted tenets of the profession (Wilkins et al. 2016)

Reviews of the literature on social work supervision have struggled to identify studies that explore this relationship (Carpenter and Bostock. 2013)

Reclaiming Social Work: A national evaluation

5 children's services departments across England

- Roll-out of systemic unit model of service delivery

Achieving excellent social work through embedding systemic approaches to practice in children's services.

What is group supervision?

Model of supervision that has shown promise in areas of social worker practice development (Lietz, 2008)

In group supervision the supervisor's responsibility is implemented *in the group* and *through the group* (Kadushin and Harkness, 2014: 275)

Groups of child protection practitioners and managers share thinking about casework and plan interventions with families as a group

Our question:

To what extent and in what ways would the discussions held group supervision sessions transfer to the direct practice of workers when they met with and worked with families?

Research Methods – what did we do

- Observations of 14 group supervision sessions
- Observations and audio-recordings of 22 practice sessions – home visits
- Observations and analysis of each conducted and recorded independently and blind
- Thematic analysis then used to identify prevalent themes that crossed-over between supervision and observation schedules

Thematic Transfer

- Collaboration
- Empathy
- Focus on the child
- Clarity about concerns
- Intervention

Collaboration

Supervision

Two social workers dominated the case discussion and often talked over each other and other team members. The other social worker and the family practitioner hardly spoke at all

Practice

Mother: ‘I’m trying to get a job at the moment’.
Worker: ‘I’d put that on the back-burner for now, you’re managing, things are fine,…if you got a job, that might add that extra pressure to your family life’

Collaboration

Supervision

Workers discuss Mum's care of the child; improvements in mum's confidence in caring for child and their strengthening attachment. Clinician asks 'How can you prop up this emerging relationship?'

Practice

Social worker, speaking to mother: 'I want you to take credit for this…it's so different from how things were…I'm interested in what you've done…What was it that allowed you to go, right "I'm going to try things differently?"'

Empathy

Supervision

The team were concerned that mum's new relationship may be violent and she may not be disclosing this. The manager described the mother as confrontational and distrustful of authority

Practice

Social worker to Mum: 'I'm not telling you to sever all ties, but to come to the conclusion, you're never going to get along, so it's best for you to agree not to have a relationship anymore'

Empathy

Supervision

The manager raises questions about the family's relationship with the school. She questions what the mother's expectations of education are.

Practice

[Social worker reflects]: 'You're upset with how the school perceives you and you're upset with me right now as well... It sounds like you feel very persecuted… you're feeling really targeted because of your race.

Child Focus

Supervision

Discussion focussed exclusively on the parent, very little discussion focussing specifically on children.

Practice

Social worker refers mainly to the parents. The child is only discussed in needing ‘to get out and explore’, but there is no further mention of them

Child Focus

Supervision

Manager proposes that perhaps it would be interesting to explore Mum's expectations of parenting. What are her priorities?

Practice

Social worker asks: 'That's something I was going to ask you – how do you think [child] compares to others her age?' '[So] if you were able to manage her behaviour better you would feel better about everything'.

Clarity around risk and concerns

Supervision

After lengthy discussion of case background, actions included arranging child protection conference venue and discussing housing options clearly with mum.

Practice

Given that there is an upcoming child protection conference, it is surprising that it is not clear why children's services are involved. Some minimal discussion around housing and education but the concerns are not made clear.

Clarity around risk and concerns

Supervision

The manager notes the strengths in that the Mother reported the child missing, which suggests that she has expectations that they *should* return home. There are boundaries in place.

Practice

What would be your main concern? What sort of things are you aware of as triggers that might make you think something's going on? What do you think needs to happen to [reduce concerns]?

Intervention

Supervision

Regarding linking hypotheses to interventions, attending services was the most common action or indicator of positive change.

Practice

Social worker to client: ‘you’ll get through the assessment, they are going to make a recommendation, and you must be compliant with whichever course of treatment that they are going to give you’

Intervention

Supervision

Clinician suggest: ‘if it’s going to be referred to [service] we need to specify what it is that [service] will be doing and how the family feel about working with us on that.

Practice

Social worker asks mother and step-father: ‘What would [service] do that would push down our worries? What would you have to see to say this has been really helpful for us?

- **Conclusions**
  - Provides a grounded study of practice *within* supervision and in what ways this can impact on direct practice with families.
  - Supervision can make a tangible difference to the way in which social work professionals work with families.

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Next Steps

- Continue with our programme of work, looking at the content and multi-faceted impact of social work supervision.
- UoB aims to develop an empirical evidence base of supervision and supervisory practice, using research that gets close to practice.
- Join the conversation…

https://www.beds.ac.uk/goldbergcentre

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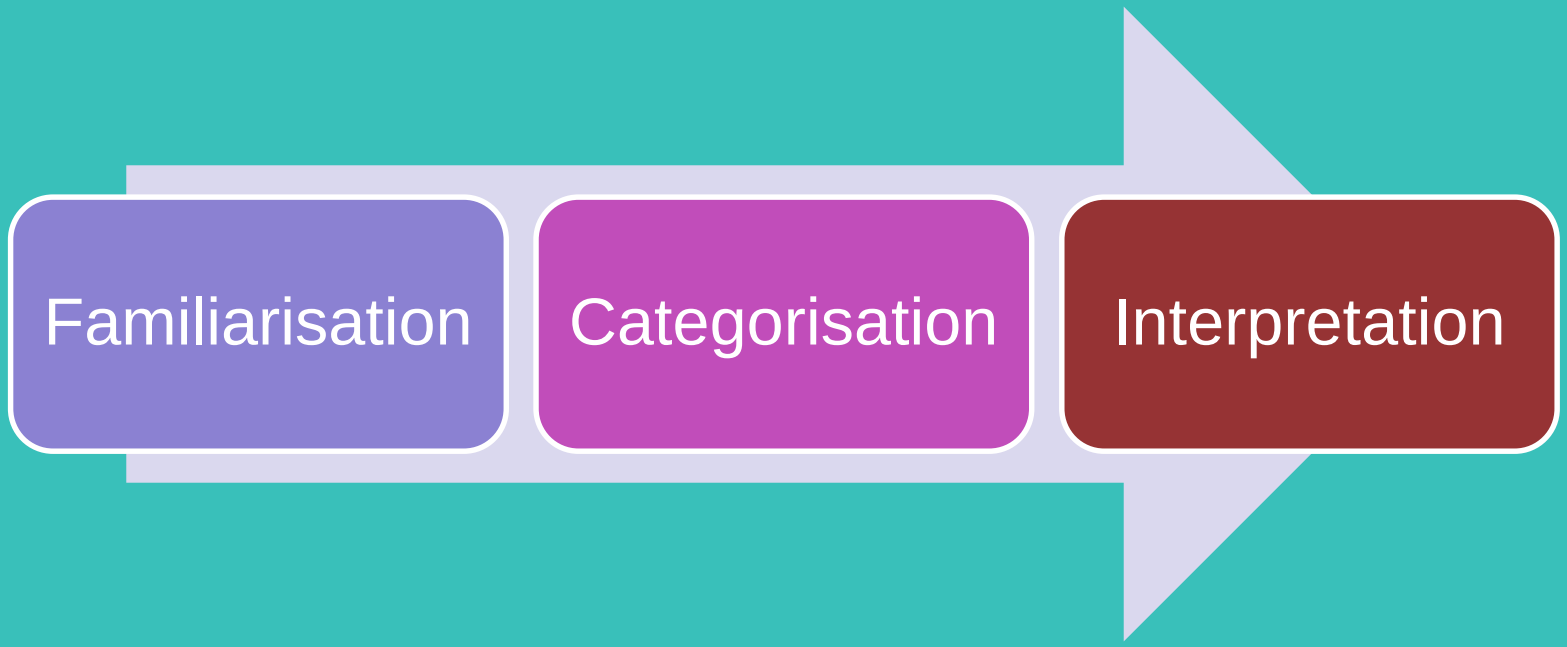
Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to explore the data sets, using a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990)



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Intervention

Supervision

There was no clear focus on intervention or goals for intervention in this case, Focus on what change they wanted from the mother (mental health), rather than what interventions they could offer or how they could achieve this change

Practice

SW to client: ‘you’ll get through the assessment, they are going to make a recommendation, and you are compliant with whichever course of treatment that they are going to give you, if you acknowledge that you have these issues…’

Statistically significant association between quality of systemic case discussion and quality of practice (r=0.44, p=0.04)

Research Methods – what we observed for

- Relational nature of problems
- Considering multiple perspectives, including that of child & families
- Curiosity and flexibility about cases
- Clarity around risks
- Interventions linked with hypotheses
- Collaborative group working

Categorising of supervision

Based on structured observation notes, supervisions divided by the extent to which they were characteristic of systemic supervision models:

- 4 un-systemic
- 8 some but not all dimensions (green shoots)
- 8 systemic

Observation of practice

22 home visits of workers who had been part of supervision sessions were observed and recorded

Recordings were coded independently using a SW practice skills coding handbook (Forrester et al. 2013)

Key social work practice skills coded deriving a grade between 1 and 5

- What is group supervision?

Systemic unit meetings are held weekly and attended by a small multi-skilled team, including in some but not all, sessions a clinician trained in systemic family therapy

They are designed to provide a practice forum for reflecting on practice, understanding risk to children and planning interventions to support families.

Supervision and Practice

"I would expect the family to experience workers as being more mindful of how they are speaking with [families] …. I would expect them to experience less punitive, harsh language; to really feel like people are genuinely trying to understand them … less telling people what to do and more exploring what gets in the way of families doing something else."

"We do a lot of describing risks but not a lot of thinking why that description worries us and what we are going to do about it. They are all statements of truth as if that is the way it is. If we change the way we see that, **what would happen then?**"

Limitations and Conclusions

- **Small sample; but one of the biggest used so far in this line of research**
- **Associations work both ways; do good skilled social workers have great supervision?**

Systemic Social Work Practice

- Social workers who practice systemically support families to mobilise their own problem-solving resources by encouraging them to think in a reflexive, more relational way about problematic patterns within the family.

- Thinking reflexively, and acting differently in light of those insights, is at the heart of systemic social work practice and viewed as a key mechanism to support change for children.

Quotations are commonly printed as a means of inspiration and to invoke philosophical thoughts from the reader.

THIS IS A SLIDE TITLE

Here you have:

- A list of items
- And some text
- But remember not to overload your slides with content

Your audience will listen to you or read the content, but won’t do both.

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Bring the attention of your audience over a key concept using icons or illustrations

IN TWO OR THREE COLUMNS

Yellow
Is the color of gold, butter and ripe lemons. In the spectrum of visible light, yellow is found between green and orange.

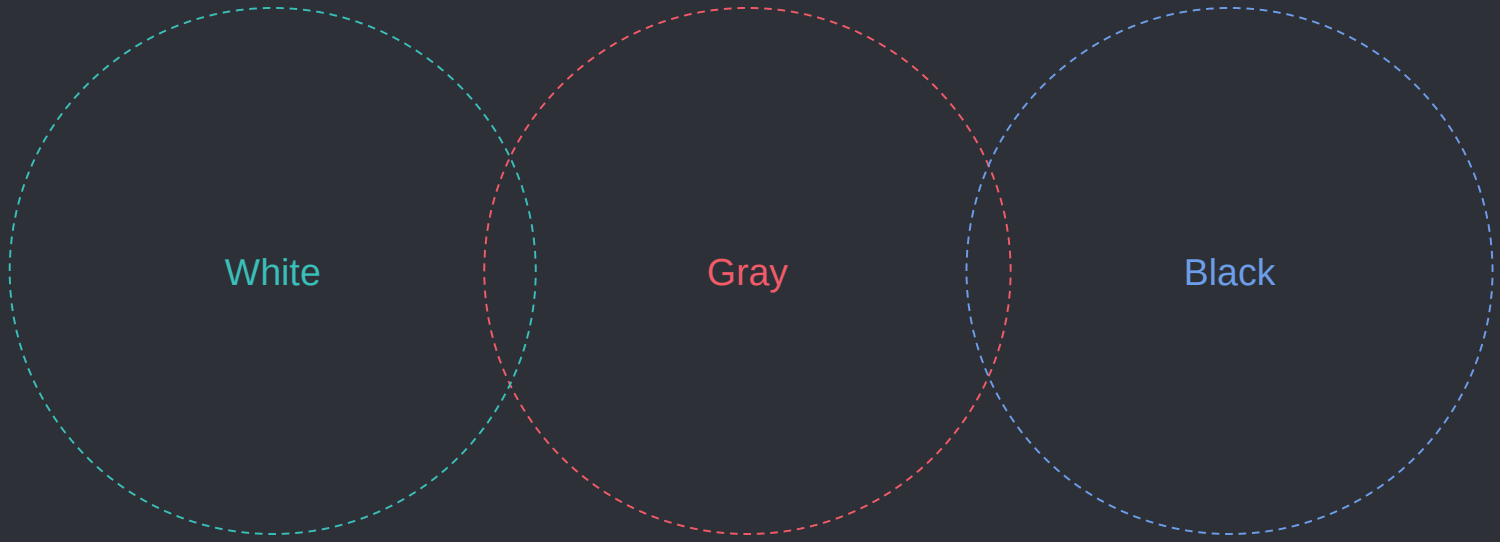
Blue
Is the colour of the clear sky and the deep sea. It is located between violet and green on the optical spectrum.

Red
Is the color of blood, and because of this it has historically been associated with sacrifice, danger and courage.

Systemic Group Supervision

WANT BIG IMPACT?
Use big image.

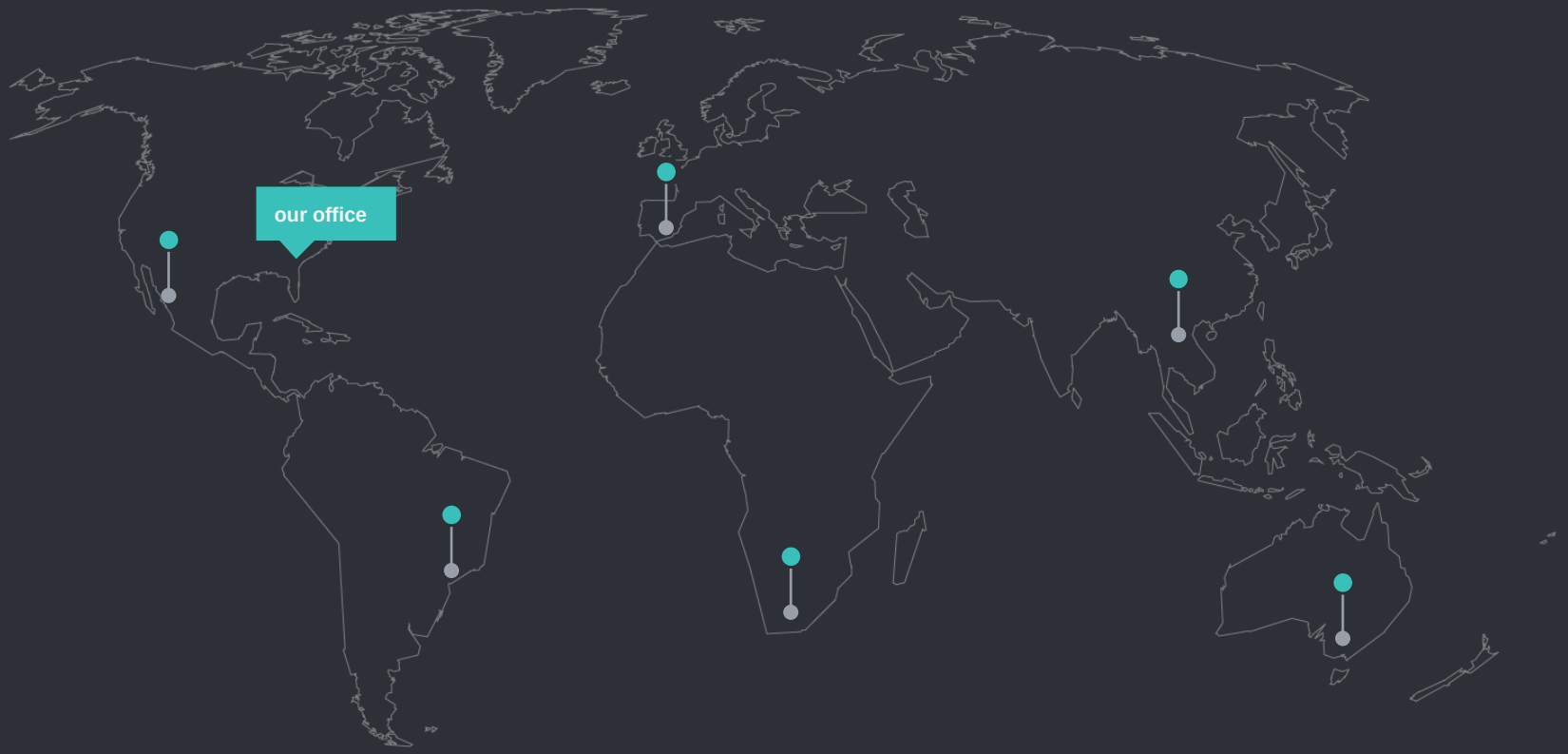
USE CHARTS TO EXPLAIN YOUR IDEAS



AND TABLES TO COMPARE DATA

	Supervision	Practice Observation
Child Focus		
	30	**15**
Orange	**5**	**24**

MAPS



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89,526,124$

That’s a lot of money

185,244 users

And a lot of users

100%

Total success!

OUR PROCESS IS EASY

First

Second

Last

Systemic Group Supervision

- **Collaborate** with group members, drawing on different ideas and areas of expertise.
- **Reflect** on and challenge established ideas about families, exploring problems in the context of systems between people, rather than within individuals.
- Be **curious** - use hypothesising and dilemmas to create curiosity about family logic, scripts and beliefs and to reflect on one's own professional position in the system
- Explore **risk** to children from multiple perspectives, including families and other professionals
- **Intervention -** Developing hypotheses into clear, actionable conversations to be undertaken with the purpose of influencing the family system and effecting change for children

LET’S REVIEW SOME CONCEPTS

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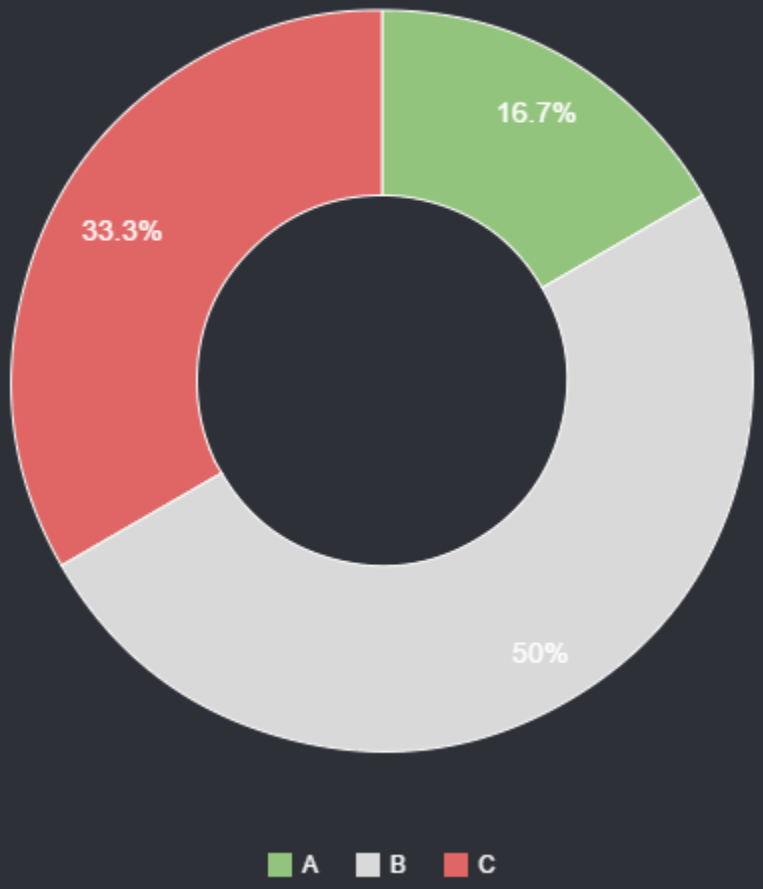
Systemic Social Work Practice

- Systemic approaches understand families as systems rather than individuals
- Problems are viewed as arising in relationships, interactions and language between individuals rather than within individuals themselves
- Systemic social work practitioners help families resolve their difficulties by exploring how they operate in relation to others and how these relationship patterns impact on children
- A key concept is reflexivity; exploring risk to children from multiple perspectives, including families, allowing for multiple explanations and solutions for the problems facing families



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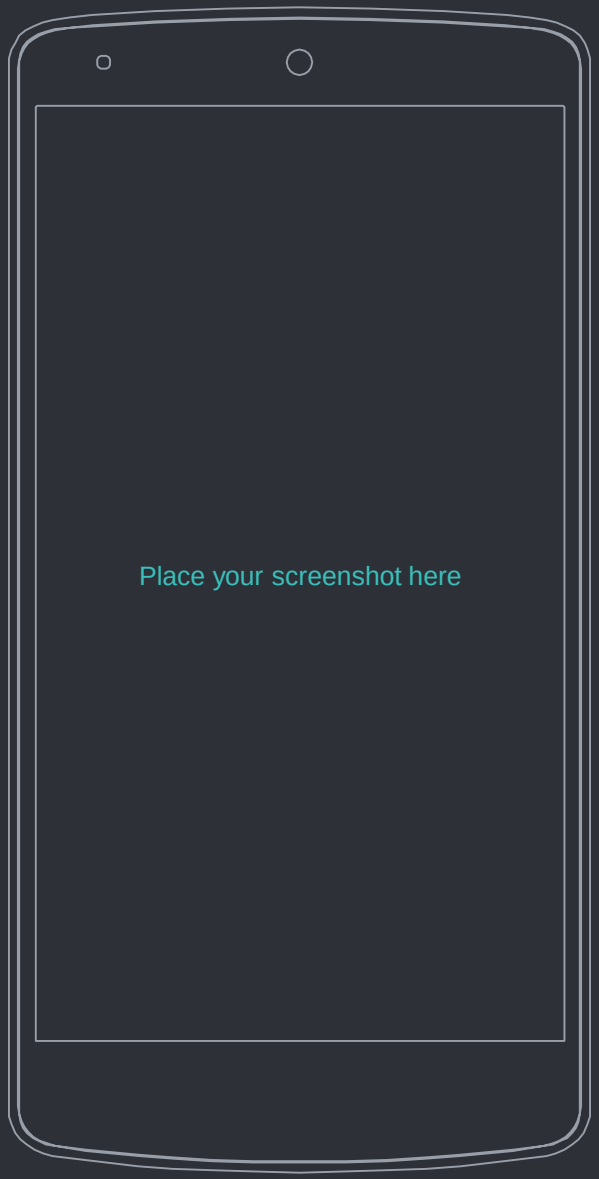

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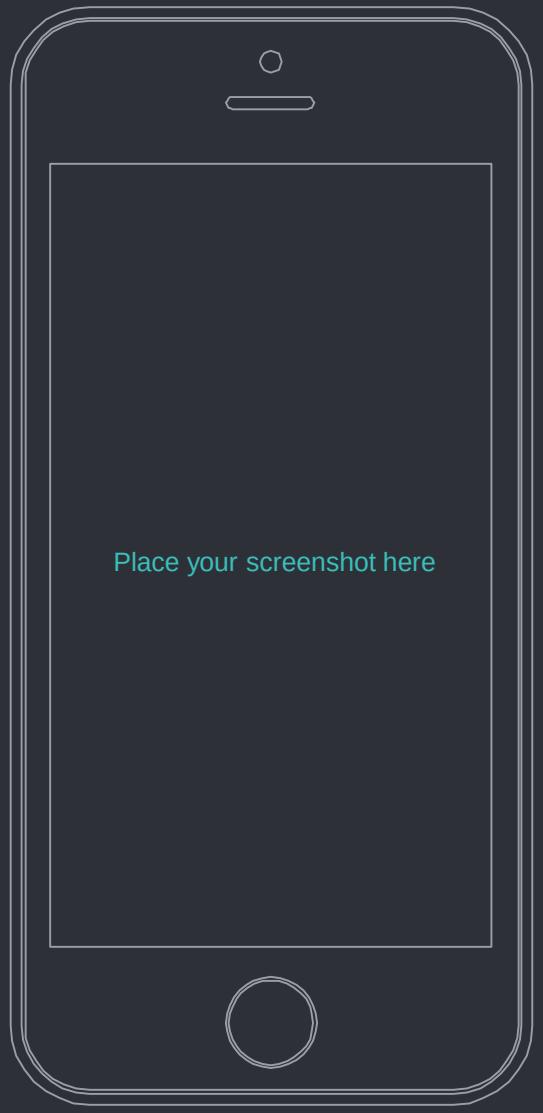

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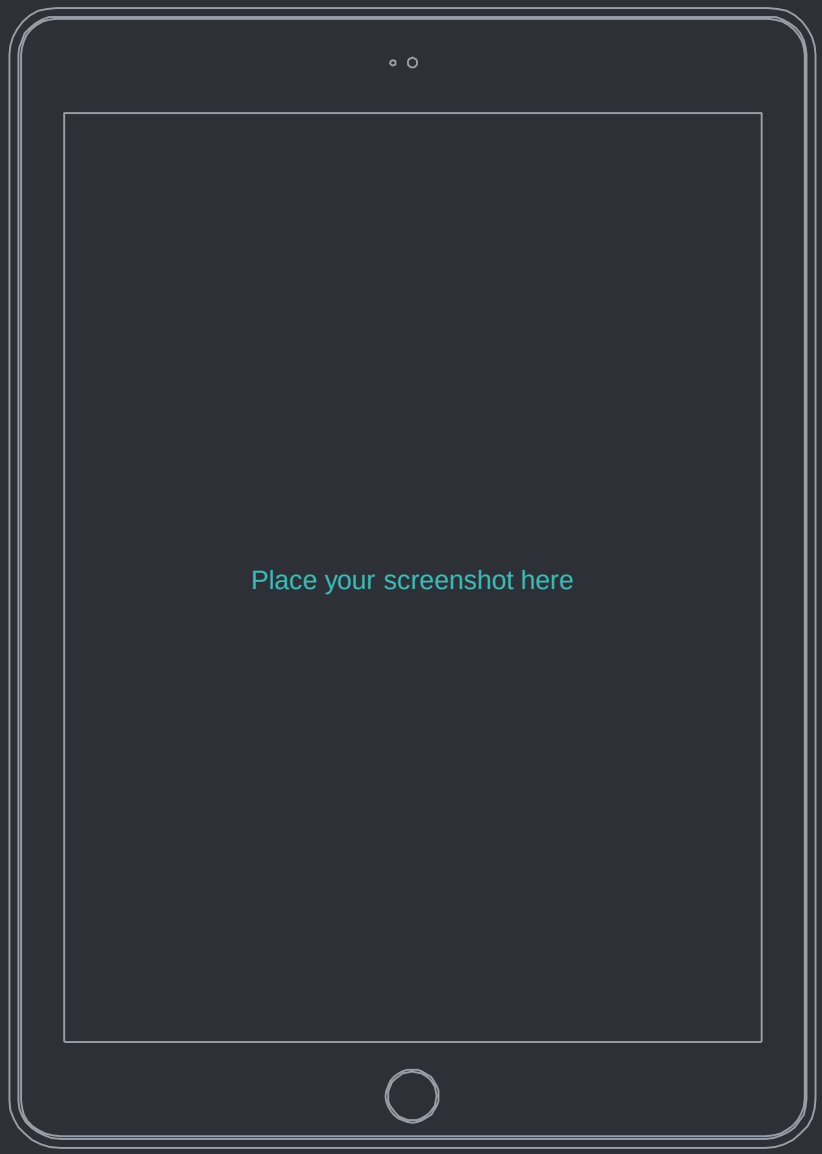

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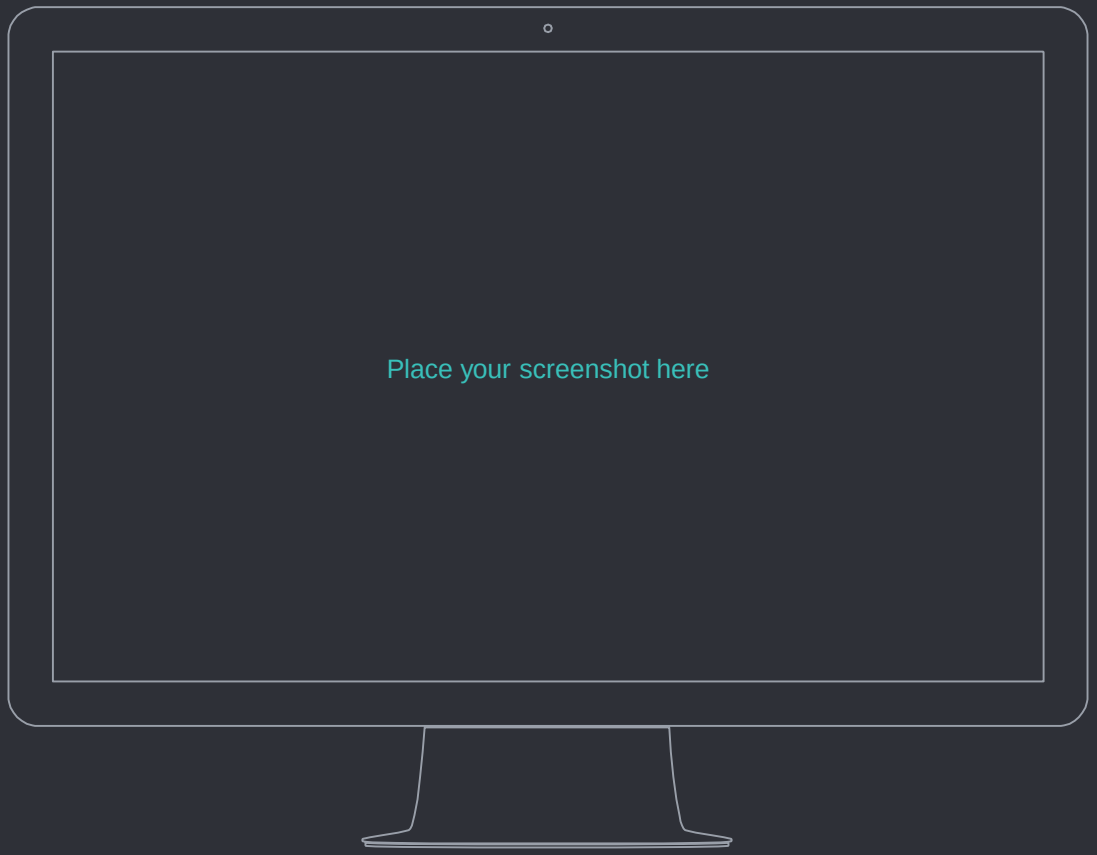

Supervision and Practice

- In child protection and child welfare supervision often described as the ‘cornerstone’ of good social work practice (Laming, 2009)
- However, reviews of the literature on social work supervision have struggled to identify studies that explore the relationship been supervisory practice and direct practice between social workers and those using services (Carpenter et al. 2013)
- Where effectiveness evidence exists, most supervision research focuses on the self-reporting of workers (stress, wellbeing, learning) rather than discernible differences made to their practice (O'Donoghue and Tsui 2015)

Thanks!

ANY QUESTIONS?

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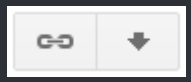

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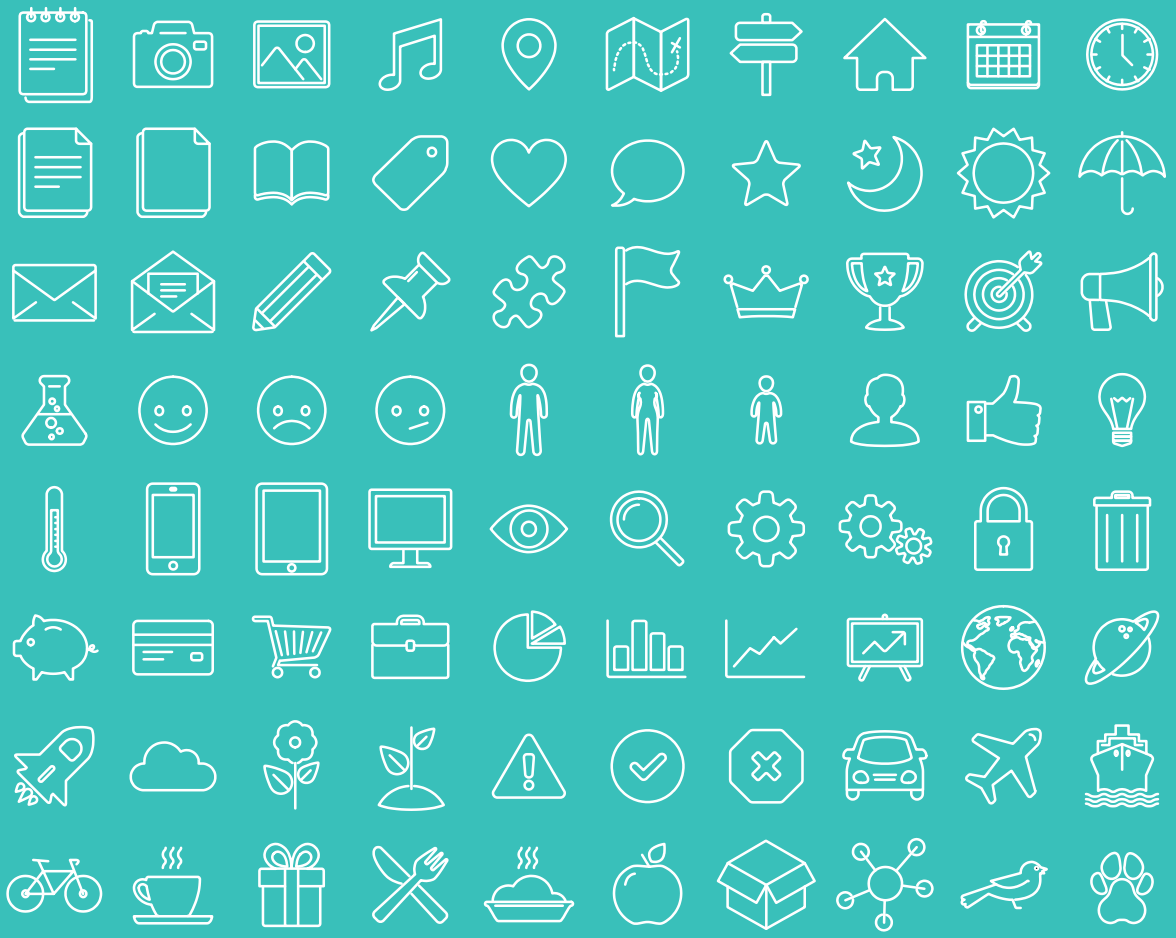

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