



Department
for Education

Knowledge and skills statement for child and family practice supervisors

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Knowledge and skills for child and family practice supervisors

This statement of knowledge and skills provides the basis for accrediting practice supervisors in child and family social work.

Practice supervisors are qualified social workers whose primary function is to supervise the practice and decision-making of child and family practitioners, and to develop the skills of individuals and teams within child and family social work services. This requires experience of working with a high level of social complexity and risk of harm, and is likely to require substantial experience of working within the statutory system.

The practice supervisor will be able to do the following:

1) Promote and govern excellent practice

Establish and maintain a highly valued position of influence within the organisation, and be recognised for extensive knowledge and skill in the profession of child and family social work. Help shape and influence an environment which enables excellent practice by setting high standards and motivating others to do the same. Demonstrate optimistic behaviour, and build positive relationships with children and families and other professionals. Lead by example, showing integrity, creativity, resilience and clarity of purpose. Be visible and accessible to all staff, children and families.

Be accountable for ensuring the highest professional standards and professional conduct. Design and implement measures to assure the quality of practice and the effective throughput of work. Interrogate decisions, ensuring they are underpinned by theory and the best evidence and that they will contribute to the goals of the family and their social work plan, whilst ensuring that the safety of children remains the highest priority. Closely monitor the wellbeing of children in public care, ensuring that they grow up in homes in which they are happy and thriving, holding high ambitions for their futures.

2) Developing excellent practitioners

Recognise, respect and value the expertise of practitioners and provide a practice framework, underpinned by theory and the best evidence, within which they can work effectively. Explain and champion the framework to practitioners, other professionals, children and families and set an expectation that this framework will be applied to practice. Facilitate use of the best evidence to devise effective

interventions, which are most likely to support family welfare and reduce risk to children. Secure excellent practice through an analytical understanding of different patterns of family functioning, matched with service responses which are most likely to effect change for families, as well as support children in public care and young people leaving care.

Recognise the strengths and development needs of practitioners, and use practice observation, reflection and feedback mechanisms, including the views of children and families, to develop practice. Develop a culture of learning and improvement, where staff are sufficiently stretched and mentored to meet their aspirations. Gauge different learning styles and recognise when the role of the practice supervisor is to teach and when it would be more effective to draw on practitioners' own knowledge. Invest available resource into staff and service development, drawing on the expertise of children and families.

3) Shaping and influencing the practice system

Provide a safe, calm and well-ordered environment for all staff, ensuring that processes are fit for purpose and efficient. Create an ethos within which staff are motivated and supported to be ambitious on behalf of children and families. Use resources, including those that lie within families and communities, to the best effect. Facilitate constant reflective thinking about the welfare of families and the safety of children. Build and develop influential and respectful partnerships between practitioners and partner agencies. Pay attention to different structures, pressures, priorities and levers for influencing and shaping the thinking of others.

Share practice knowledge and expertise and influence the wider organisation and national system to function to the best effect. Offer constructive advice and creative, strengths-based solutions to difficulties.

4) Effective use of power and authority

Apply a proportionate and ethical approach to the exercise of authority, which develops and maintains relationships with families and professionals and ensures the protection of children. Maximise opportunities for children and families to make informed choices. Secure an up to date, working knowledge of relevant legislation and case law. Exercise statutory powers where social work assessment shows that families require help and support and children are at risk of significant harm, ensuring that actions are proportionate to risk. Support practitioners to always communicate clearly, honestly and respectfully the purpose and content of the social work plan.

Recognise the patterns of relationships between professionals, identifying where these are likely to compromise the welfare of families and the safety of children, taking immediate and corrective action. Invite challenge and debate and be accessible to children, families and professionals. Ensure the professional network identifies the logic by which children and families are functioning and use this as a basis for effective engagement. Take into account diversity, the experience of discrimination and the impact of poverty.

5) Confident analysis and decision-making

Create a culture of focused thinking which consistently explores a wide range of contexts (including family and professional stories, the chronology of critical events, social and economic circumstances). Generate multiple hypotheses which make sense of the complexity in which children and families are living. Help practitioners to make decisions based on observations and analyses, taking account of the wishes and feelings of children and families. Ensure that practitioners are ambitious for children and families and that the long-term and life-long consequences of decisions are fully considered at all stages of planning and review, and in consultation with children and families. Build relevant relationships with children and families and professionals to test current hypotheses and dominant perspectives. Ensure that children and young people's expectations are met where possible and any disappointment sensitively acknowledged and sufficiently addressed.

Establish recording processes, provide the full analysis underpinning decisions, making sure the rationale for why and how decisions have been made is comprehensive and well expressed.

6) Purposeful and effective social work

Ensure practitioners adopt an approach to practice which is proportionate to identified risk and need. Use supervision processes to challenge the balance of authoritative intervention and collaborative engagement to determine how current practice is achieving the best long-term outcomes for children and families. Use focused questioning with practitioners to clarify the direction of work, and identify whether practitioners need to adopt a more reflective and curious approach, or respond with greater pace and assertion. Ensure that family narratives are sought and listened to, that all relevant family members, including fathers, are engaged in shaping plans and supported to carry these out, and that practice empowers families to make positive changes.

Ensure methods and tools used are based on the best evidence, that progress is frequently reviewed and that the social work plan is adjusted accordingly. Reflect

upon and review the welfare and support needs of children and families and be alert to evidence of actual or likely significant harm ensuring that identified risks are managed and new risks identified, assessed and addressed.

Implement effective strategies for ensuring throughput of work. Frequently review the requirement for continued involvement so that cases are closed in a timely manner and that families have an appropriate and long-term support plan where that is required, and ensure that no child or family is left unnoticed in the system.

7) Emotionally intelligent practice supervision

Recognise how different relationships evoke different emotional responses, which impact upon the effectiveness of social work practice and provide responsive, high quality individual supervision. Use mechanisms such as peer supervision and group case consultation to help identify bias, shift thinking and the approach to case work in order to generate better outcomes for children and families. Recognise and articulate the dilemmas and challenges faced by practitioners and use this expertise and experience to guide, assist and support the provision of services.

Identify emotional barriers affecting practice and recognise when to step in and proactively support individuals. Promote reflective thinking to drive more effective discussions so that reasoned and timely decision-making can take place.

Demonstrate a high level of resilience within pressured environments, be attuned to the effect of high emotion and stress and respond in calm, measured and pragmatic ways.

Reflect upon the confidence of practitioners and adapt management and leadership style according to the needs of individuals and the organisation. Protect practitioners from unnecessary bureaucratic or hierarchical pressures and have in place strategies to help manage the root causes of stress and anxiety. Continually energise and reaffirm commitment to support families and protect children.

8) Performance management and improvement

Explain to practitioners the full legal, regulatory, procedural and performance framework within which they operate and be accountable for their work within it.

Provide opportunities for staff to give and receive constructive feedback on performance. Recognise and commend hard work and excellent practice and build social workers' confidence in their practice. Challenge complacency with a commitment to continued improvement and confidently hold poor practice to account.

Establish available capacity so that work is allocated appropriately across the staff group and ensure best use is made of resource, ability, interests and ambitions. Devise and implement systems which both demonstrate effective practice and trigger immediate corrective action where necessary. Produce and utilise data to understand current demand, historical patterns and likely future trends. Scrutinise system performance and devise and implement effective and timely improvement plans.

Strike a balance between employing a managerial, task-focussed approach and an enabling, reflective leadership style to achieve efficient day-to-day functioning. Develop a strategy for future improvements and contribute to similar within the wider organisational system. Draw on and share best practice within local and national contexts. Implement communication channels with children, young people, families and other professionals inviting feedback and ideas for improvement. Respond thoughtfully and proactively to complaints and mistakes, creating learning opportunities for self, staff and the organisation.



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