

Handout 1: Recording supervision

Excerpts from supervision records

'Excerpt 1: Pam is having marital difficulties at the moment, so we discussed what extra support she will need at this difficult time.

Excerpt 2: Jack wanted to talk about his professional development, so I agreed to look out for suitable courses for him.

Excerpt 3: Anne's work in this area is very weak. I made it clear to her that she must improve.

Excerpt 4: Kira talked about feeling racially harassed by Joan and Ellen. I told her that she needs to be less sensitive about such matters and to learn how to get on better with people. She needs to understand that she will make herself unpopular if she goes around making allegations.

Excerpt 5: Paul described the difficulties he had had at the planning meeting. He told me how several people did not get involved and how frustrated he felt by this. I told him I could fully understand how he felt. He went on to say that the situation had left him feeling uneasy about other meetings. I asked him what he might do about this, but he was unsure what he could do. I suggested he might want to talk to Sarah about it as she used to chair those meetings and she had never had these problems. Paul said he would do that but would find it difficult to fit it into his busy schedule. I explained that it was important for him to make the time as the problem wasn't simply going to go away. He then said that ...

Excerpt 6: Very useful supervision session again. Nothing specific to report.

Excerpt 7: Ravi is new to working in the child protection field. He is doing well so far and is beginning to understand that child abuse is not acceptable in our culture.

Excerpt 8: We discussed Sam's workload. She claimed that she was overloaded but I told her that it is the same for everybody in the team.

Excerpt 9: I have been worried about my role as convenor of the supervision development group, so we spent a lot of the session looking at how I could deal with some of the difficulties involved. Ian was very helpful in suggesting ways forward.

Excerpt 10: Everyone in the team is concerned about the new hot-desking arrangements, so much of the supervision session was spent discussing how the team can deal with the issues involved.'

Handout 1: Recording supervision (Presenter's version)

Excerpts from supervision records

Excerpt 1: Pam is having marital difficulties at the moment, so we discussed what extra support she will need at this difficult time.

This raises issues of confidentiality. It would have been better to record something like 'having personal difficulties of a confidential nature'.

Excerpt 2: Jack wanted to talk about his professional development, so I agreed to look out for suitable courses for him.

For one thing, there is more to professional development than looking out for suitable courses. A good supervisor should be helping supervisees to draw out the learning from their experience, supporting them in developing reflective practice. Training should be seen as the icing on the cake when it comes to learning – most of the learning should arise from practice itself (facilitated by skilful supervision). For another thing, it is not helpful for the supervisor to take responsibility for finding suitable courses. It would be more appropriate for him or her to encourage the supervisee to do their own research into what opportunities are available, to encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning.

Excerpt 3: Anne's work in this area is very weak. I made it clear to her that she must improve.

Even if Anne's work is weak, this could have been worded more tactfully and supportively. As it stands, it sounds like a negative and judgemental comment, rather than a helpful piece of constructive feedback. Is all of Anne's work 'weak'? Or are there areas of strength to counterbalance some of the areas for development? If so, it would be helpful to mention these too, to give a more balanced picture.

Excerpt 4: Kira talked about feeling racially harassed by Joan and Ellen. I told her that she needs to be less sensitive about such matters and to learn how to get on better with people. She needs to understand that she will make herself unpopular if she goes around making allegations.

It perhaps goes without saying that it is unacceptable to think this, let alone record it. There is, of course, a moral and professional obligation to take any such concerns seriously and investigate them in line with the appropriate policy within the organisation concerned.

Excerpt 5: Paul described the difficulties he had had at the planning meeting. He told me how several people did not get involved and how frustrated he felt by this. I told him I could fully understand how he felt. He went on to say that the situation had left him feeling uneasy about other meetings. I asked him what he might do about this, but

he was unsure what he could do. I suggested he might want to talk to Sarah about it as she used to chair those meetings and she never had these problems. Paul said he would do that but would find it difficult to fit it into his busy schedule. I explained that it was important for him to make the time as the problem wasn't simply going to go away. He then said that ...

There is no need to record this amount of detail. It is a waste of valuable time and serves no useful purpose. This could lead to a very useful discussion about how to decide what to record and what to leave out, what is relevant and what is not.

Excerpt 6: Very useful supervision session again. Nothing specific to report.

This, of course, goes to the opposite extreme and is far too vague. This point can feed the discussion about getting the balance right – recording what needs to be recorded, nothing more, nothing less.

Excerpt 7: Ravi is new to working in the child protection field. He is doing well so far and is beginning to understand that child abuse is not acceptable in our culture.

This seems to assume that child abuse is acceptable in Ravi's culture and is therefore potentially a racist comment. This could lead to a useful discussion about how issues relating to challenging racism can be handled in supervision.

Excerpt 8: We discussed Sam's workload. She claimed that she was overloaded but I told her that it is the same for everybody in the team.

If it is indeed the case that everyone in the team is overloaded, then this should clearly be a matter of concern for the supervisor, as it is identifying a staff care need. If it is not the case that it is 'the same for everybody', then the supervisor is fobbing this supervisee off. So, either way, this is not a wise response to a concern being raised about work overload.

Excerpt 9: I have been worried about my role as convenor of the supervision development group, so we spent a lot of the session looking at how I could deal with some of the difficulties involved. Ian was very helpful in suggesting ways forward.

This raises the question: whose supervision session is this? This sort of problem is particularly common in situations where the supervisor has a poor or non-existent relationship with their own supervisor and is therefore reduced to seeking help about their own issues inappropriately from their supervisees. This is not to say that supervisors cannot ask colleagues for advice or feedback about issues, but it should not be done in a supervision session where the focus should be on the supervisee's needs and not the supervisor's.

Excerpt 10: Everyone in the team is concerned about the new hot-desking arrangements so much of the supervision session was spent discussing how the team can deal with the issues involved.

If this is an issue that affects the whole team, why is it being dealt with in an individual supervision session rather than at a team meeting? This is a common mistake among inexperienced or unconfident supervisors who feel more comfortable discussing issues on a one-to-one basis than with the whole group. This is potentially very problematic because: (i) it is wasteful of time, as the same discussion will be repeated unnecessarily in several supervision sessions; (ii) each supervisee's valuable one-to-one supervision time will be taken up by wider team issues; and (iii) the team will not have the opportunity to discuss collectively an issue or set of issues that affects the team collectively.

Handout 2: Avoiding the drama triangle

The drama triangle

'The helping professions tend to attract people who want to make a difference to other people's lives, but this enthusiasm for offering support and trying to "make things better" can become problematic if care is not taken to maintain appropriate boundaries when involved in situations of conflict. In such circumstances, people who see themselves as "victims" of the wrongdoing or insensitivity of others will often be looking for someone to "rescue" them, and we need to keep our wits about us if we are not to be drawn into conflicts and ascribed a role we did not sign up for, or do not see as appropriate.

The drama triangle involves three "players".

► **The victim**

This person has a real or imagined understanding that someone is doing them harm, is bringing a threat to their happiness, or is in some way persecuting them.

► **The persecutor**

This person is perceived by the "victim" as the guilty party, as the person responsible for causing the problems.

► **The rescuer**

This is the person who is seen by the "victim" as an avenue for addressing the problems caused by the "persecutor".

The problem with this triangle is that it involves the development of an unhealthy dynamic. Members of the helping professions can be a prime target for being seen as a "rescuer" – seduced into taking sides and losing neutrality, perhaps only to find out later that the victim's perception of being persecuted was not an accurate one (it is sometimes the case that it turns out to be the "victim" who has been doing the persecuting). The drama triangle can lead us to adopt one person's partial interpretation instead of developing our own more holistic, thorough and impartial assessment. Being aware of the dangers of the drama triangle can help us to avoid falling into the trap of being drawn into taking sides.'

Thompson S and Thompson N (2018) *The Critically Reflective Practitioner* (2nd edition). London: Palgrave.