research
in practice
for adults

Getting the most out of supervision

This resource helps you identify aspects of good supervision and enables you to develop these aspects in practice. It includes:

> **An outline of what supervision is, its purpose and why it's important.**

> **Two exercises to complete before supervision to help you think about:**
> - **what 'good' supervision means**
> - **how your experiences affect your current view and practice of supervision**
> - **how the individuals involved, the relationships between them and external factors such as organisational culture may impact on supervision.**

These exercises encourage you to think about how to get more out of supervision in the future.

> **A tool to help you identify key parts of your organisation's policy and framework for supervision with examples of a supervision agreement, agenda and record form which you can use in practice.**

> **Two tools to support reflective practice in supervision, focusing on how to think about and respond to a difficult situation, and how difficult cases can be raised and discussed in supervision.**

The focus in these practice tools is on individual or 1:1 supervision (a regular meeting between an individual and his/her supervisor) but the tools provided can be used to support and inform an individual's approach to group or ad hoc supervision.

Group supervision (for example, group discussion of cases or debriefings) can play a significant part in encouraging reflective practice and in providing support, and ad hoc supervision (where advice or guidance is sought as and when it is needed) plays a crucial role in the day-to-day work of practitioners and supervisors. However, these should not replace 1:1 supervision, as time is still needed for supported individual critical reflection, line management, caseload and workload management, and professional development.

Dartington

What is good supervision?

The Social Work Reform Board (SWRB) identifies **four aims for supervision.** It should:

1) improve the quality of decision-making and interventions
2) enable effective line management and organisational accountability
3) identify and address issues related to caseloads and workload management
4) help to identify and achieve personal learning, career and development opportunities.
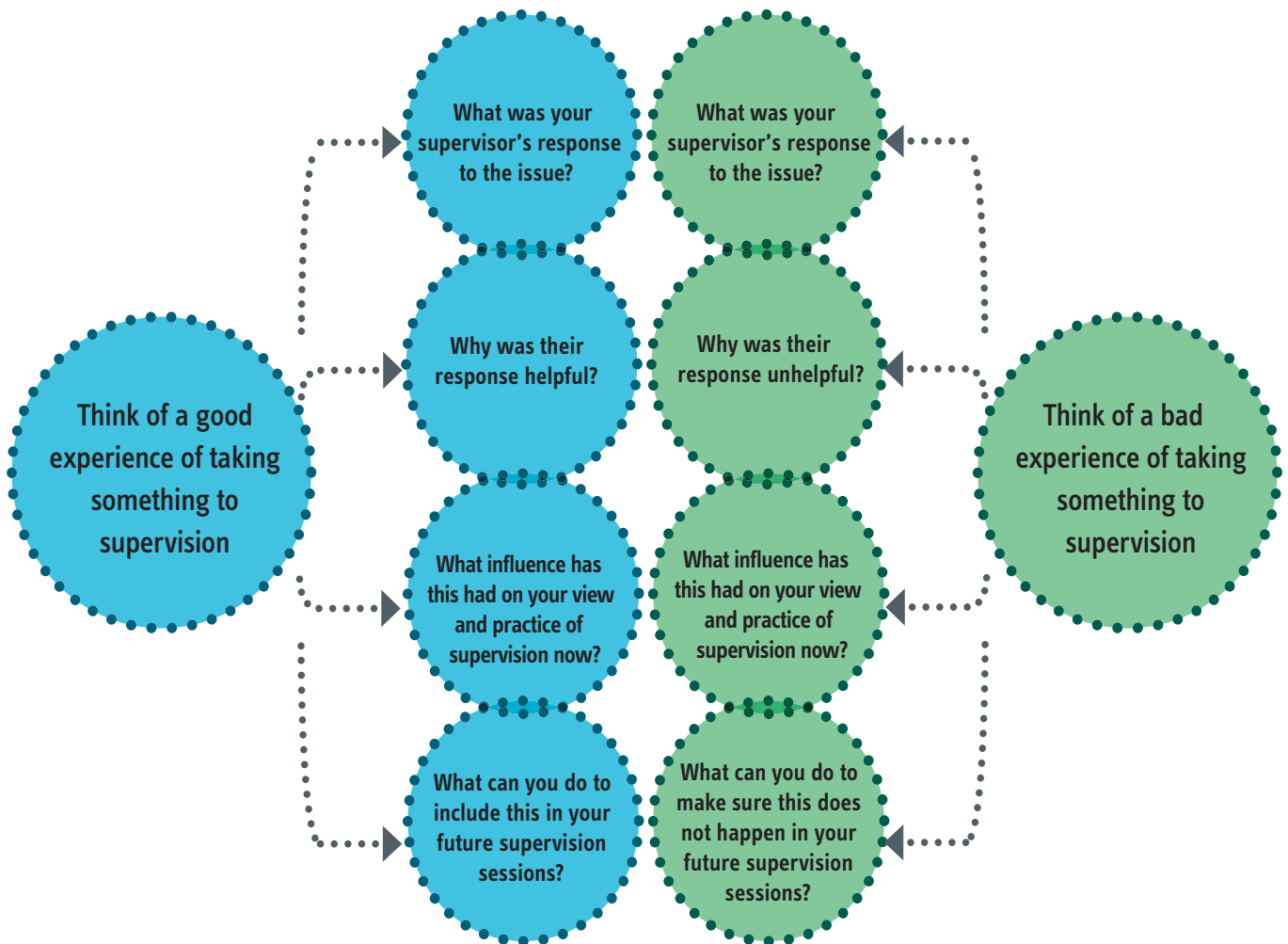 *(SWRB 2010: 3; see also SWRB 2012).*

Good supervision should encompass each of these aspects (although each one does not have to be included in every supervision meeting). Supervision is not solely about risk management or monitoring performance - it is a professional practice that offers a safe space for case discussion and reflection; guidance, support and motivation; and constructive challenges to an approach in order to improve practice (Brown et al, 2012). It combines education and support with an administrative function (Carpenter et al, 2012). Good supervision leads the worker to be confident, secure and to engage in problem-solving (Wonnacott, 2012).

Three models are useful when thinking about the supervision relationship:

> The *'authoritative' model* (Wonnacott, 2012) emphasises that supervision is collaborative and that it should reflect the needs of the worker.

> The *'positive expectations'* model (Morrison, 2005) highlights that supervision should start from the assumption that the person being supervised wants to do well.

> The *'4x4x4' model* (Morrison, 2005) begins by noting the four groups affected by supervision: service users, staff, the organisation and partners. It then highlights the importance of the four stages of critical reflection (see tool 3); this is integral to improving the quality of decision making and interventions (aim 1 above). Lastly, it highlights four functions of supervision: management, support, development and mediation between the individual and the organisation (the first three of which overlap with aims 2, 3 and 4 above).

These models highlight that a supervisor should be supportive. If we think of someone climbing a ladder, they will need someone to hold the ladder so they can reach the top (Nosowska, 2013). They do not need someone who forgets to hold the ladder (neglectful), or who climbs the ladder with them (over-controlling), or who shouts up that "Everything is fine" without holding the ladder (permissive).

Think of a good experience of taking something to supervision

What was your supervisor's response to the issue?

Why was their response helpful?

What influence has this had on your view and practice of supervision now?

What can you do to include this in your future supervision sessions?

Think of a bad experience of taking something to supervision

What was your supervisor's response to the issue?

Why was their response unhelpful?

What influence has this had on your view and practice of supervision now?

What can you do to make sure this does not happen in your future supervision sessions?

Before supervision

Everyone has experience of being supervised and this can affect how you approach supervision now and in the future. For example, in a Research in Practice for Adults workshop on supervision with frontline staff and managers (2013), one social worker said that a supervisor once fell asleep during their supervision session. This meant that they lost respect for their supervisor and were then reluctant to attend sessions or discuss issues with them.

Even 'little' things like a supervisor cancelling the session at the last minute can have an impact. Similarly, positive experiences of supervision (like receiving good support on an issue) can be built upon. Thinking about these experiences can help you identify what you are looking for from supervision in the future.

The questions above, based on Morrison's work on the impact of past supervision experiences (2005), are designed to help you think about your experiences of supervision and how they impact on your approach to supervision at the moment. You can think about the answers to these questions and then discuss your reactions in group or 1:1 supervision; this could enable your team to focus on getting the most out of supervision and help you build a positive relationship with your supervisor.

Before supervision

This tool helps you think about how supervision is currently conducted in your organisation and how the person being supervised, the supervisor and the organisational culture impacts on supervision. This supports you to identify what may need to change and encourages you to think about how any changes can be achieved.

1. **Think about and describe the current practice of supervision**
   (both your practice and practice in your organisation).

2. **Are each of the following aims or functions of supervision addressed in this practice?**
   Does current practice meet these aims?

   > **To improve the quality of decisions and interventions (through critical reflection).**
   > **To enable effective line management and organisational accountability.**
   > **To identify and address issues related to caseloads and workload management.**
   > **To help identify and achieve personal learning, career and development opportunities.**
   > **To mediate between an individual and the organisation.**

Consider the following three questions for each aim or function:

- What is working well?
- What could be improved?
- What is not working?

3. **Why are these things happening?**

4. **What can the person being supervised control in these areas?**
   What do they have influence over?
   What is out of their control?

5. **What can the supervisor control in these areas?**
   What do they have influence over?
   What is out of their control?

6. **What can the organisation control in these areas?**
   What do they have influence over?
   What is out of their control?

7. **How will this information impact on your future supervision practice?**

8. **What actions will you take to address any issues identified here?**

Your organisation's policy and framework

The Social Work Reform Board 'Standards for Employers and Supervision Framework' (SWRB, 2012) sets out that all employers should ensure social workers have regular and appropriate supervision. It also states that employers should:

> > **have an accountability framework**
> > **have effective workforce planning systems**
> > **have systems for workload and case allocation**
> > **provide practical tools and resources to enable social workers to do their job safely and effectively**
> > **provide opportunities for continuing professional development.**

This tool highlights questions to answer about the policies and frameworks in your organisation, supporting you to identify the parts which affect you and your supervision. The tool can also support those creating supervision policies by acting as a checklist to ensure key areas are included.

For each area in the table below think *How does this affect my supervision?*

- *Who is affected by the policy?*
  Are there any specific arrangements for students, ASYE or other categories of staff?

- *How is supervision defined?*
  Does the document specify the outcomes for service users, staff and the organisation?

- *What are the aims and functions of supervision?*
  Does the document address the aims and functions outlined in these tools?

- *What are the administrative and procedural processes for supervision?*
  What does the document say about the time, location and frequency of supervision?

- *What is the content of supervision?*
  How are the aims and functions of supervision to be discussed and acted upon?

- *How do you set up a supervision agreement?*
  What should it contain? (Key areas of this are included on the next page).

- *What are the responsibilities of each party?*
  (Key responsibilities are included on the next page).

- *How do you set up an agenda for the session?*
  What should it contain? (An example agenda is included on the back page).

- *How do you record the session?*
  (Key areas to include in a record are included on the back page).

- *Are elements of supervision dealt with by different people (for example, some organisations separate critical reflection from line-management)?*
  How are these elements brought back together?

- *What are the policies and procedures for addressing disagreements or difficulties within or with supervision?*
  Does the policy link to relevant HR frameworks?

If an area is missing from the policy, or you need more information, what action will you take to address this?

Key areas in a Supervision Agreement

Creating an agreement about the process and content of supervision helps you manage and meet expectations, and ensures you focus on the aims and functions of supervision. This tool highlights key areas which should be included in a Supervision Agreement and makes suggestions for the roles and responsibilities of each party (drawing on our work with Partner organisations, BASW/COSW 2011 and Skills for Care and the CWDC 2007). Your organisation may already have a policy on these areas (you can use the tool on the first page to identify these) or you may need to agree some of these areas in a supervision session.

The agreement should be signed and a record should be kept by both parties.
The agreement should also be reviewed at agreed intervals so:

- *both parties can ensure it is being followed*
- *it can be updated as needed to reflect changes in organisational policies and frameworks*
- *that it reflects the needs of the person being supervised.*

An agreement could begin with clear statements on:

- *the purpose and aims of supervision*
- *the commitment from both parties to:*
  - *prepare for and prioritise the session*
  - *recognise the expertise of both parties*
  - *participate fully and constructively in the session*
  - *ensure relevant issues are raised in the session, and that these will be documented with actions agreed and reviewed.*

The agreement should also record the roles and responsibilities of both parties. The suggestions provided here have been reviewed in Research in Practice for Adults workshops by practitioners and managers. Your organisation may have roles and responsibilities in place (see front page of this tool) or you may need to think about the following areas (on opposite page).

	Supervisor	Person being supervised
Before supervision	Ensure a supervision agreement is in place.	The person being supervised should contribute to the creation of these processes and, if time is needed for others in the team to prepare for or respond to supervision, support others in the team when needed. Both parties should follow the agreed process throughout supervision.
	Book regular supervision slots in a suitable location.	
	Create and agree a process for changing the time, date or location of a session.	
	Create a regular supervision agenda (see suggested agenda).	
	Create a recording process (see back page).	
	Create a specific agenda before a session (including actions and outcomes of previous session for review).	
	Ensure a secure supervision file is in place.	n/a
	Ensure time and support are available to prepare for the meeting.	n/a
During supervision	Manage the agenda.	Contribute and provide focussed input to the agenda.
	Ensure the supervision addresses the aims and functions of supervision. Agree and allocate time and frequency for addressing each area.	Advise supervisor of any additional support needed to address the aims.
	Recognise and acknowledge good practice.	Highlight good practice.
	Raise any issues or concerns.	Raise any issues or concerns.
	Provide and engage with constructive feedback and challenge.	Provide and engage with constructive feedback and challenge.
	Provide support and advice (or help access this from appropriate source).	Request support and advice when needed.
	Identify outcomes and actions (along with potential difficulties and discussion about how to overcome these).	Identify outcomes and actions (along with potential difficulties and discussion about how to overcome these).
	Record the session.	Review record of supervision.
After supervision	Ensure a record is made of the session.	Record any decisions in the appropriate case notes where needed.
	Provide the person being supervised with a copy to sign and agree within an agreed time frame.	Sign and agree the record of the session.
	Keep a confidential copy of the record of the session.	Keep a confidential copy of the record of the session.
Always	Ensure all organisational policies, frameworks and procedures are followed.	Follow all organisation policies, frameworks and procedures.

A Supervision Agenda

A regular agenda could include:

1. Reviewing and agreeing the record of the previous session or noting any disagreements.
2. Agreeing the agenda for the session to ensure both parties' needs are addressed.
3. An update on actions from the previous session and a review of the outcomes.
4. Critical reflection to support improved decision-making and interventions.
5. Line management and work update.
6. Case and workload management.
7. A review of Continual Professional Development, learning and career opportunities.
8. Agreeing actions.
9. Reviewing the supervision process.
10. Any other business.
11. Date of the next meeting.

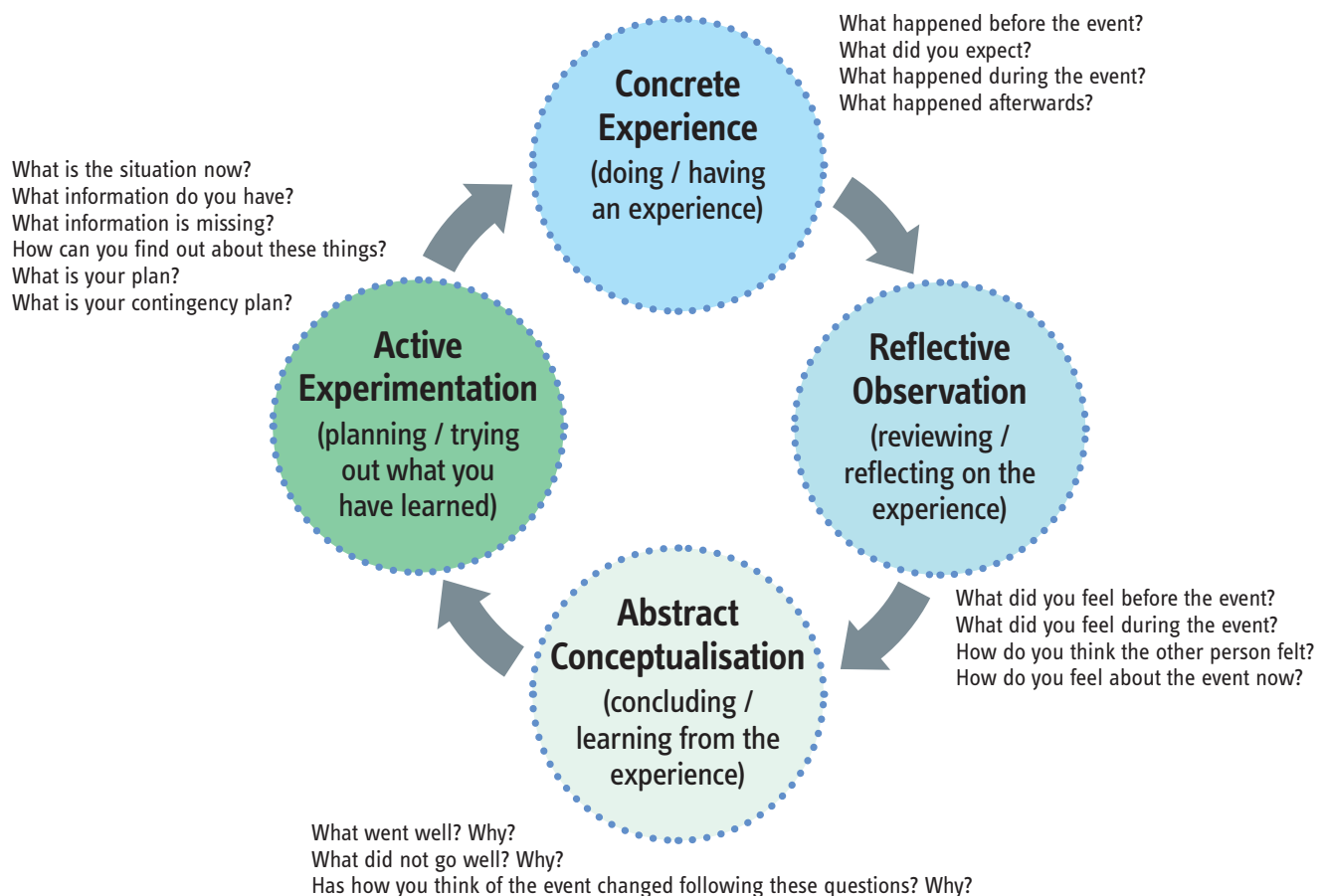| Record of Supervision		
Date and time		
Those Present	Staff member/post = Supervisor/post =	
Headings from Agenda (for example)		
Review of previous session		
Changes or additions to agenda		
Update on actions from previous session	1. 2.	
Critical reflection	See tool 3.	
Line management and work update	e.g. Work plan and priorities, review of individual and team targets, key issues and achievements.	
Case and workload management	e.g. Issues and support needed, priorities.	
CPD opportunities	e.g. Discuss role and any training needs.	
Actions	1. 2.	
Review of supervision		
Any other business		
Date and time of next meeting	*Signed (supervisor):*	*Signed (supervisee):*

Critical reflection in supervision

The first aim of supervision is to improve the quality of decision-making and interventions (SWRB, 2010). Critical reflection is one way to achieve this and includes:

- **Critical thinking**   *Identifying how we know what we know.*

- **Analysis**   *Breaking something down into parts.*

- **Reflection**   *Looking back at what has happened and looking forward to what will happen.*

- **Reflexivity**   *Identifying your impact on a situation (Research in Practice for Adults, 2012).*

When you are dealing with a difficult issue or case, critical reflection can help you identify what you are doing right (so that you can learn from this good practice) and where you can improve your practice.

This tool provides example questions which can be asked in supervision to explore all four stages of **Kolb's (1984) critical reflection cycle** to solve a dilemma.

What is the situation now?
What information do you have?
What information is missing?
How can you find out about these things?
What is your plan?
What is your contingency plan?

What happened before the event?
What did you expect?
What happened during the event?
What happened afterwards?

Concrete Experience
(doing / having an experience)

Active Experimentation
(planning / trying out what you have learned)

Reflective Observation
(reviewing / reflecting on the experience)

Abstract Conceptualisation
(concluding / learning from the experience)

What did you feel before the event?
What did you feel during the event?
How do you think the other person felt?
How do you feel about the event now?

What went well? Why?
What did not go well? Why?
Has how you think of the event changed following these questions? Why?

Critical reflection in supervision

You can also apply this model to critically reflect on supervision itself. Answering these questions will help you think about how supervision affected a recent case and what you would change or maintain about this approach to supervision. Your answers to these questions can be discussed in group or 1:1 supervision to help a team focus on getting the most out of supervision or to build a positive relationship with your supervisor.

Think about supervision in relation to a case that you or your team members have been involved in:

- *Answer the questions on 'Concrete Experience' in relation to supervision of this case.*
  For example – Who was involved?
  What happened during supervision?

- *Answer the questions on 'Reflective Observation' in relation to supervision of this case.*
  For example – How did you feel during supervision?
  What do you think your supervisor/supervisee felt?

- *Answer the questions on 'Abstract Conceptualisation' in relation to supervision of this case.*
  For example – How did supervision discussion affect the case?
  How did critical reflection affect the case?
  How did supervision decisions affect the case?

- *Answer the questions on 'Active Experimentation' in relation to supervision of this case.*

You can also think about:

Frontline staff

How would you approach supervision now?

- *What issues would you now raise with your supervisor about this case?*
- *In what ways would your supervisor be able to help and advise you?*
- *What might get in the way of critical reflection in this case?*
- *How would you overcome this?*
- *What decisions need to be made?*

Supervisors

How would you approach supervision now?

- *What questions would you ask the person you supervise about this case?*
- *Which tools and research would you use?*
- *In what ways would you be able to help and advise the person you supervise?*
- *What might get in the way of critical reflection in this case?*
- *How would you overcome this?*
- *What decisions do you need to make?*
- *How would you direct the person you supervise?*

Why is good supervision important?

Research shows that, currently, much supervision does not meet the aims of 'good' supervision. For many, the current focus of supervision is case management - with limited time for critical reflection, training, development and encouragement (Manthorpe et al, 2013). Also, many are not receiving supervision as often as recommended by the Social Work Reform Board (Baginsky et al, 2010) and studies highlight that practitioners want more time for, and support with, critical reflection (Jack and Donellan 2010).

Improving supervision so it incorporates the four aims can:

> **Improve the experiences and outcomes of service users and carers**

While there is limited evidence about the process and outcomes of supervision (Carpenter et al, 2012), studies have shown that outcomes-focused supervision can improve the experiences of service users (Harkness and Hensley, 1991) and reflective practice can improve patient outcomes (Schőn, 1983).

> **Improve the experiences and job satisfaction of frontline staff**

Good supervision can prevent staff burnout (Lloyd et al, 2002). There is also a link between good supervision and job satisfaction, with staff believing supervision improves their practice and helps them to prioritise their workload (Manthorpe et al, 2013).

> **Decrease staff turn-over**

In addition to the more individualised benefits, improving supervision practice can also benefit an organisation. If social workers are more satisfied with their job they are more likely to stay in that role (Manthorpe et al, 2013), meaning that crucial knowledge and experience can be developed within an organisation.

The enclosed practice tools will help you improve your supervision practice and ensure you get the most out of supervision. They will help you set up your next supervision meeting, ensuring you focus on all of the aims of supervision. The tools are best used in the following order:
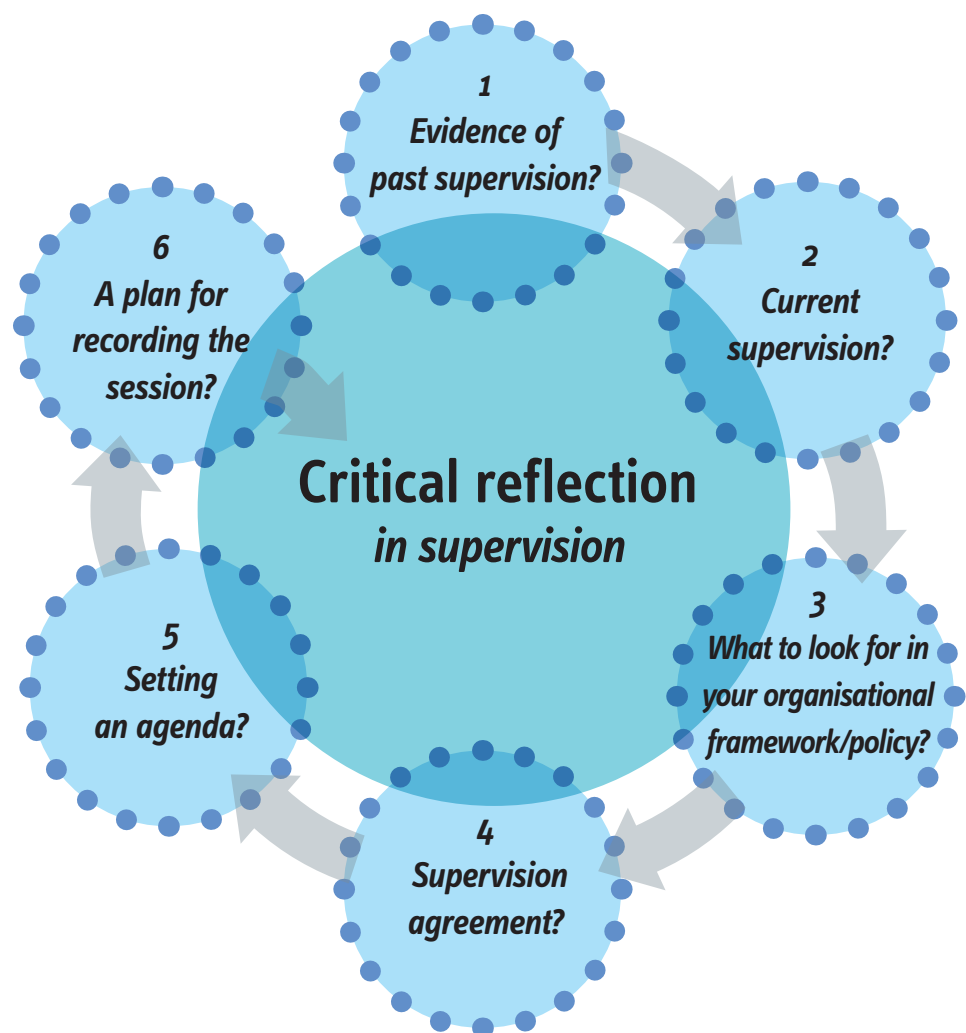
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