Effective supervision in adult social care

Free summary edition
This is the free summary edition of Effective supervision in social care, which has been published by Skills for Care to support adult social care organisations plan and implement effective supervision.

This summary gives you the outline of the full publication, which is available for sale at £20 through the Skills for Care online bookshop at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/bookshop.

You will also find Skills for Care’s Effective workplace assessment in social care guide there.

In both cases, as well as giving fuller information, the priced editions contain quotes and tips from a range social care employers who are recent winners of relevant Skills for Care ‘Accolades’ awards.

Effective supervision and Effective workplace assessment are for any adult social care organisation, and may be useful also for individuals who employ their own care workers.

In particular, Effective supervision is not only for those who are formally designated as supervisors, but is for all those with any role in supervision, including supervisees who want to know what to expect of their supervisors.

Both publications make particular reference to the expectations placed upon CQC-regulated social care employers by the Care Certificate in respect of inducting new workers.

**Introduction**

**Background**

It is known that there are huge variances in the training, supervision and workplace assessment of adult social care workers.

Effective supervision is important to all, whether a new care worker or the CEO of a multi-site national care organisation.

Ineffective supervision can reduce productivity, increase absenteeism, create or prolong workplace conflict, damage the culture and – for adult social care employers - impact the quality of care being delivered.

**Effective supervision in social care** provides advice and information on:

- what supervision is and its benefits
- what to look for from a supervisor and how to develop supervisors
- different supervision approaches
- supervision in induction.

It includes tips from experienced supervisors and from Skills for Care ‘Accolades’ - winning employers and Skills for Care endorsed learning providers.
Supervision involves making the time and developing the practical structure to give support to co-workers. This is done using various approaches during formal and informal supervision and appraisal.

A supervisory relationship is one in which a person with some knowledge and skill, takes responsibility and accountability for the wellbeing and work performance of the person being supervised—the supervisee. It is ‘one-to-one’ (with exceptions), and is supportive rather than judgemental.

Why is supervision important?
People needing care and support often say that services are only as good as the person delivering them. Any inability of workers to check understanding, seek support and assistance can be frustrating, damaging to confidence and potentially dangerous.

Effective supervision benefits the worker, their managers, their organisation and crucially, the people being supported.

It requires:
- a clear supervision policy, with practice that supports that policy
- effective training of supervisors
- a strong lead and example by senior managers
- performance objectives for supervision practice in place for all supervisors
- monitoring of actual supervision practice - both frequency and quality.

The CQC expects that supervision is part of the development of those providing care and support. It is also required by the Care Act 2014.

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The role of the supervisor and what is expected

An effective supervisor is likely to have the following attributes:
- Empathy
- Listening ability
- Encouragement
- Openness and honesty
- Critical reflection
- Knowledge
- Good communication skills

The right values and attitudes
Supervisors must have the right values and attitudes to be effective in the role. Clearly, the supervisor must reflect the values of the organisation and the “settled ways of thinking of feeling about something” that are ‘attitudes’ to the work being done.

Who can provide supervision?
- Registered managers (as part of the expectations of CQC)
- Directors/owners (as ‘fit and proper persons’ as per the Care Act 2014)
- External trainers
- Internal trainers
- Care workers/occupationally competent workers
- Line managers and team leaders
- Senior care workers
- Registered social workers or nurses.

Of course not all of those listed here will be supervisors in any given workplace, and there may be other roles that supervise workers in some workplaces.

What if the supervisor role is delegated to you?
If you are given the position of a supervisor in a care organisation, you are responsible for the wellbeing of your supervisees, whether that be one person or 30. If you feel that you may be promoted to a supervising position without having training as a supervisor, this is an issue you need to raise with your manager or employer.

What should supervisors know?
Supervisors need to know the scope and application of relevant legislation, policy and guidance, or other key initiatives applying to the work of their supervisees, e.g. Care Act 2014, methods of promoting more person-centred provision, the Care Certificate, etc. They must also have a good working knowledge of the principles, methods and techniques relating to organisational management, including HR and workforce development processes in their organisation.

A good understanding of workforce development will include:
- training and workforce development strategies
- sector qualifications strategies and training targets
- induction
- continuing professional development and adult learning
- career pathways.

Supervisors should have a good knowledge of how:
- the principles of supervision can be used to inform performance management
- to support individuals through professional supervision
- professional supervision supports performance.

Those managing supervisors need also to understand why social care places such emphasis on supervision, and be able to supervise others’ supervisory practice. Skills in conflict management and self-reflective practice will also be needed.

Continuing professional development for supervisors
There is an expectation upon CQC-regulated health and social care settings that every worker is suitably trained and experienced to carry out their role—and this applies just as much to supervisors as to care workers. Employers should therefore ensure that supervisors have proper training in this role before they are asked to perform new duties; or, with proper oversight, during their own settling-in period as supervisors, while they do their best to carry out their work.
Supervision qualifications and skills

There is no specific social care supervision qualification, but parts of the levels 4 and 5 social care qualifications can be beneficial to supervisors wishing to develop their knowledge and skills further, including those who are responsible for developing and supervising other supervisors.

Many of the skills required by supervisors form parts of various leadership and management qualifications, of which there are very many. Rather than searching for supervision qualifications, then, it is better to search online for leadership and management programmes and then discuss with the provider what learning is required.

There are also numerous short courses in supervision and related skills.

Scheduling

Typically, some experienced care workers may meet with their supervisors only monthly or every six weeks, but new workers will need more support than that. New workers may have on-going supervision but also have more formal points where it is agreed to review progress (potentially weekly or fortnightly is recommended).

Timing

About one to one-and-a-half hours is recommended for a formal supervision session, especially in a busy residential care or nursing home. However, some workers, particularly managers, may need to be given up to an hour longer than this. These meetings should be private and free of interruption.

Location

Formal supervision sessions should take place somewhere:

- quiet and comfortable
- away from the frontline working environment
- that offers privacy for the duration of the session.

Supervision in homecare

Many workers in homecare spend most if not all of their days working away from their employer’s base. However, the fact that the supervisor is not in the same room should not mean the homecare worker is unsupervised.

New workers, particularly those who are new to the sector, should be ably supervised until they are judged to be safe to work unsupervised. Experienced workers and their supervisors may be able to meet with one another only during formal supervision meetings agreed far in advance. However, in that case it is important to ensure that the care worker is able to contact their supervisor when needed to seek advice and expert support.

While a strong supervision culture will involve regular and properly conducted supervision meetings with all staff, it is useful to ensure that there is also telephone and possibly Skype or similar back-up.

If supervisors and supervisees might be working different shifts from each other, alternative arrangements must be clearly known by all concerned so that workers are never left ‘stranded’.

One-to-one sessions

Formal supervision is essential for completely new recruits to social care but also should continue as each worker’s career progresses. This applies top-to-bottom in every organisation and is a key part of retaining workers.

A clearly-communicated supervision policy is essential, so that all understand the expectations upon them.

Remote supervision is often a practical and cost- and time-effective method for homecare agencies, community-based organisations and other types of care settings where the supervisor and supervisee do not often work in the same place.

Landlines, mobile phones and tablets are all practical tools that supervisors and supervisees can use to keep in touch, including by video conferencing services such as Skype.

Team supervision sessions might be held after a weekly management meeting with staff, where a few individuals may all be dealing with the same vulnerable person at some point during the day or week to come.

Informal supervision provided, for example, by a line manager, should be a continual process. But even in these cases, notes should be kept of issues that come up that relate to the worker’s formal supervision or appraisal sessions.
Reflective practice enables care workers and their supervisors to reflect on a particular case or activity - whether a one-off situation or a continuing issue. This includes consideration of what works, whether best and/or recommended practice have been followed, shortfalls in the quality of provision and how they can be corrected, and related worker development needs.

Building reflective practice into supervision helps the supervisor to know the supervisee better and gain insights into their experience of doing the work. This becomes key in planning workforce deployment and development, and in managing change.

For both supervisor and supervisee, good reflective practice should illuminate the needs of the person being supported.

Preparation for a formal supervision meeting
The supervisor should be prepared with:
- knowledge and information
- help and support, as required, about any of the key aspects of the work
- written and signed records
- an agenda agreed with the supervisee
- all information and documents necessary for providing support
- information about areas of work, case difficulties and other concerns, if any, from the supervisor's own line manager, the registered manager or other senior managers.

It is recommended that the supervisee takes the time in advance to think about the meeting, reflect on recent experiences and prepare to update on progress. This will help the supervisor and supervisee to make the most of the relatively short ‘quality time’ they will be sharing.

Appraisal
Who undertakes workers’ annual appraisals varies between organisations. In any case, it is important that whoever does the appraisal is fully up-to-date with the supervisor’s file and the supervisee’s record of activities. If the appraiser is the supervisor’s line manager, the supervisee should be told what are the relative importances of the appraiser and supervisor in the assessment of their performance, and how this might affect the central supervisory relationship.

Effective supervision in social care gives a checklist for preparing annual appraisals.

People Performance Management Toolkit
Skills for Care has developed this free toolkit in partnership with NHS employers to support managers, including supervisors, in social care and health with their responsibilities for people performance management.

The toolkit aims to give managers and supervisors confidence to deal with some of the key challenges surrounding performance management, including how to manage underperformance owing to various causes, and fair disciplinary and dismissal processes.

Tools to help effective supervision
Effective supervision in social care includes descriptions of and templates for:
- Supervision policy
- Supervision agreement (contract)
- Example supervision agenda
- Example supervision record

Supervision and the Care Certificate
Adult social care organisations registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC) are expected to meet the Care Certificate standards as the minimum in inducting new workers. There will generally be workplace-specific induction in addition to the Care Certificate.

The Care Certificate includes almost 50 activities that are subject to workplace assessment and these care duties cannot be performed unsupervised until the new care worker has been assessed as competent in them. The amount of direct supervision required will vary depending on 1) how quickly the new worker can demonstrate competence and 2) circumstances arising that enable the new worker to do demonstrate this.

Key point for employers
Although social care worker formal supervision is generally a periodic process, as in this guide’s comments about scheduling, the supervision of workers new to care will be continuous line of sight supervision until their competence in each task or area of work is established.

One of the first jobs of supervisors is to explain the aims of the Care Certificate and what it means for the new member of staff. There are tools available at www.skillsforcare.org.uk/carecertificate to aid this process, including video overviews, introductory documents and frequently asked questions.

For supervision to be effective, the supervisor needs to understand what is expected of them in the induction process. Whether a supervisor has a comprehensive role throughout the induction period (and possibly beyond) or has limited duties such as being shadowed for a number of days, they should explain their role to the new worker.

It is likely that the training and supervision needs of someone new to work, or new to adult social care, will be more significant and time-consuming than those for an already experienced care worker.

Supervision is most likely to start when a new worker accompanies more experienced workers in a residential care setting or as part of a number of shadowing visits for a homecare agency.

Initial exposure to the care environment can be both daunting and upsetting, with some aspects of personal care particularly challenging for new workers. Supervisors should be conscious of this and ensure that they regularly check what impact the work is having on the worker, discuss these issues and help the new worker cope with the responsibilities of the role.

Supervision in the workplace should enable workers to ensure that their work is always in the best interests of the people being supported.

Indirect or remote supervision can only be instituted after the worker has been trained and assessed as competent in all the tasks required, including knowing their limitations and how to contact their supervisor.

Delegation
Supervisors are accountable for the decision to delegate care tasks to particular workers.

The primary reasons for delegation must always be to meet the needs of the person receiving care.
Care tasks must be delegated only to workers who are competent to undertake them. The supervisor must know, therefore, what the Care Certificate does and does not cover. They must also know the care needs of the person or people being supported, and be able to assign other workers to their care if there are needs beyond the assessed competence of the inductee.

The supervisor should always check the new care worker’s understanding and ensure that they: 1) know the boundaries of what they are expected to do, and 2) know what to do if additional care is needed that goes beyond this.

In some cases, care tasks might be delegated by someone who is not employed by the care organisation, such as when a district nurse delegates tasks to a care worker. In this case, the nurse is in the supervisor role, and must be sure that the care worker is competent and will be supported to complete the tasks.

Those responsible for supervising inductees’ Care Certificate progress must be sure that workers are meeting the required standard, and must keep the worker informed about their progress. This requires good record-keeping. The registered manager or other person who is to sign off the Care Certificate must be assured that all the standards have been fully met, and that there is evidence of this for the CQC, should it be required.

The worker to whom care is delegated is responsible for ensuring their knowledge and skills match the delegated task. They should know their limitations and when to seek advice from the appropriate manager or other person in the event that circumstances change.

The supervisor and the wider organisation are responsible for creating a culture where new workers are provided with the appropriate learning and development opportunities.

Good management practice and the assessment of performance require that, even following certification, supervisors will check and re-check periodically whether levels of supervision and delegation remain appropriate, including that the worker knows their limitations.

When inducting workers with previous care experience, it must not be assumed that previous employers have provided full training and assessment, including proper supervision. Nonetheless, experienced workers are unlikely to need to cover the full Care Certificate, provided they have evidence of learning and assessment.

New workers may have experienced different approaches to supervision with previous employers, so their induction will need to cover what is expected of them in their new supervision process.

Skills for Care’s Effective Supervision Guide

This guidance has been produced by Skills for Care to support adult social care organisations plan and implement effective supervision.

It includes advice for organisations and information for existing supervisors and those wishing to develop these skills further. Other resources in this range includes Skills for Care’s Effective Workplace Assessment guide.

The Effective Supervision Guide is available from the Skills for Care Bookshop for £20. To buy one visit: www.skillsforcare.org.uk/bookshop