ConnectED Briefing #11

Group supervision in adult social care

The issue

Many social care organisations encourage group supervision alongside individual supervision. However, it isn't always clear what additional benefits group supervision brings or what factors might be associated with it being effective.

What we wanted to find out

What are the benefits of group supervision for adult social care practitioners? What skills and organisational support might be needed to make it work well?

What we did

We searched for reviews or guidance on these issues produced since 2013.

What we found

We found a rapid review[1] and resources and guidance from Research in Practice (RiP) that includes tools for practice supervisors in adult social care.[2] The review looked at the characteristics of effective clinical and peer supervision in health and care.[1] The guidance from RiP looked mainly at reflective supervision for children and families' services but provide clarification around the use of group supervision across social care. The resources are widely applicable across social care.[2] The tools for practice supervisors include one introducing a model for reflective group supervision and one to support effective group supervision.[3]

What the evidence suggests

Uses of 'group supervision'

Group supervision can be defined as the use of a group to implement some of the responsibilities of supervision, most often for the purposes of case discussion or for exploring a practice-based issue or theme identified as of interest to the group.[1] Issues relating to individual accountability are generally reserved for individual supervision.

The benefits for practitioners and organisations

The benefits of group supervision lie in these four areas:

- Increasing **critical thinking** among practitioners: the introduction of multiple perspectives and shared reflection can help individuals to identify bias.[1,2]

- Contributing to **workforce development**: strengthening team dynamics and individual resilience, and increasing access to expertise and development opportunities.[1,2,]

- Increasing **staff knowledge, skills and confidence**: enabling staff to share and draw on shared knowledge and to receive affirmation and support from peers.[1,2]

- Reducing **stress and anxiety**: providing an open and trusted environment in which staff can build relationships and reduce isolation.[1,2]

The support and skills needed to make group supervision work well

The evidence identified group processes that can impact on the success of group supervision if not addressed through skilled facilitation. These include 'group think', the effect of power imbalances, and the amplification of existing dysfunctional team processes.[1,2] These can be addressed, and the benefits of group supervision maximised, through the following:

- **Skills-training for supervisors** in leading and facilitating groups in ways that will promote trust and enable critical reflection in a safe space.[1,2] Models of reflective practice and problem-based or action learning methods can support this process.[2,3]

- **Early establishment of a shared understanding of the purpose, focus and structure** of the group. These should include communication of the group's aims, boundaries and scope, and a clear definition and shared understanding of the roles of participants and the facilitator.[1,2,3]

- **Organisational support**. Through policies and processes that link the activity to professional standards, ensure protected time, and communicate the purpose, value, and practice of this form of supervision.[2]

What this means for practice

Supervisors involved in setting up and leading group supervision may need training in the use of appropriate models and methods for facilitation. Organisational support is needed to communicate the value and purpose of group supervision for staff.

Quality and completeness of the evidence

We found limited research on group supervision in the helping professions, and no reviews focusing solely on the value or effectiveness of group supervision within adult social care.

Further reading

This tool can be used to identify the purpose, focus and structure of a group: https://adultsdp.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/5851/tool10.pdf

This is one model or approach that could be used for group reflection: https://adultsdp.researchinpractice.org.uk/media/5850/tool9.pdf

Contacts for further information

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References

[1] Rothwell, C. et al. (2019). *The characteristics of effective clinical and peer supervision in the workplace: a rapid evidence review: Final report*. University of Newcastle. Available at: https://prod.hcpc-uk.org/globalassets/resources/reports/research/effective-clinical-and-peer-supervision-report.pdf (accessed 15 June 2023).

[2] Earle, F. et al. (2017). *Reflective supervision: Resource pack*. Dartington: Research in Practice.

[3] Research in Practice and Department of Health & Social Care (2021) *PQS Developing Supervision Programme: Tools for practice supervisors in adult social care*. Available from: https://adultsdp.researchinpractice.org.uk/