

# Counselling Supervision

## Lecture 6

### Supervisory Relationship

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# **Supervisory Relationship**

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## **6.1 Introduction**

In this lecture, we will explore the following factors in a supervisory relationship, Components, essential elements, person hood and the Power and Authority.

### **6.2 Expected Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this lecture, you should be able to:

- a) Discuss supervisor–supervisee relationship
- b) Explore on the, components, essential elements, personhood and the power and authority in a supervisory relationship

### **6.3 Supervisory relationship**

Supervisory Relationship (SR) may be best described as ‘an intervention provided by a more senior member of a profession to a more junior member or members of that same profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). A positive and strong SR is the heart (the cornerstone) of successful work in supervision (Bernard & Goodyear, 2009, 2014; Corey et al., 2010). The supervisee has perceived support and confidence within a SR has the potential to change their perception of their self-confidence, self-efficacy, cognitive complexity, and commitment for the profession (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998).

#### **Characteristics of a good supervisor**

They are empathic, genuine, open and flexible. They respect their supervisees as persons and as developing professionals and are sensitive to individual differences (e.g. gender, race, ethnicity) of supervisees. They also are comfortable with the authority and evaluative functions inherent in the supervisor role, giving clear and frequent indications of their evaluation of the counselor’s performance.

Good supervisors really enjoy supervision, are committed to helping the counsellor grow and evidence commitment to the supervision enterprise by their preparation for and involvement in supervision sessions. These supervisors’ evidence high levels of conceptual functioning, have a clear sense of their own strengths and limitations as a supervisor. They are aware of how their personal traits and interpersonal style may affect the conduct of supervision. Finally, good supervisors have a sense of humor, which helps both the supervisor and supervisee get through rough spots in their work together and achieve a healthy perspective on their work.

#### **Supervisor Competencies**

Knowledge of the role and function of counselling supervision. Knowledge of legal, ethical and regulatory guidelines as they apply to supervision. Competencies in all areas of care in which supervisory occur. Ability to set goals and objectives, create and implement a supervision plan. Familiarize with the methods of evaluation and ability to apply them fairly. Understand existence of dual relationships and their impact of supervisory objectivity and judgement. Knowledge of multicultural issues and ability to respond to multicultural differences.

#### **6.4 The Components of Supervisory relationship**

The working alliance between supervisor and supervisee.

This relationship is an essential base for clinical supervision it has three steps;

1. First, this relationship should be supportive. That is, the supervisor should be interested and motivated in teaching the supervisee, in a manner that makes the supervisee feel heard, encouraged, and capable. In a supportive supervisory relationship, supervisees should feel comfortable to discuss clients, including both personal and clinical challenges that arise when working with clients, and ask questions as needed.
2. Second, this relationship should involve bi-directional trust. Supervisees should know that the supervisor will teach them the skills needed to perform ethical and effective clinical work. Supervisors should actively work to create a safe, professional, and inviting environment for open and challenging discussion of supervisees' training.

Supervisors should be especially aware of their own possible discomfort with difficult conversations, (e.g., regarding difficult feedback or boundary setting) and rather than avoiding such discussions actively work to reduce the impact of their discomfort on their supervisory practice.

The supervisor should use self-disclosure, as appropriate, to demonstrate this bi-directional trust and encourage and welcome ongoing feedback from the supervisee regarding the supervisory relationship to help mitigate supervisee tendencies towards non-disclosure.

3. Last, the supervisory relationship should be marked by bi-directional respect. This includes being willing to provide constructive feedback to supervisees, and likewise, to be open and receptive to receiving constructive feedback from supervisees as well. Barnett, Cornish, Goodyear, and Lichtenberg (2007) reported that numerous studies have found that the quality of the supervisory relationship is one of the key components determining outcomes, which is also true for the client–therapist relationship. Effective and ethical supervisors provide constructive feedback to their supervisees in a supportive and nonjudgmental environment. They regularly include a discussion of ethics in their feedback to supervisees. They are well trained, knowledgeable, and skilled in the practice of clinical supervision. They limit their supervision to those areas in which they are competent, and they delegate portions of supervision when necessary to make sure that supervisees receive the best quality of supervision possible. Because they recognize their responsibility to serve as role models for supervisees, effective supervisors conduct themselves ethically in the supervisory relationship (Barnett, in Barnett, Cornish, et al., 2007).

Considerable research has been conducted on the supervisory relationship and the process of supervision. From an empirical base and practical knowledge, Holloway (1999) has identified three essential components of the supervisory relationship:

- a) The interpersonal structure of the relationship, including the dimensions of power and involvement;
- b) The phases of the relationship;

- c) The supervisory contract, consisting of the establishment of a set of expectations for the tasks and functions of supervision.

Holloway (1995) conceptualized the supervisory relationship by looking at it from a contextual perspective. Her model described three phases of the supervisory relationship.

During the early phase of the relationship, the tasks are clarifying the nature of the relationship, developing ways to work collaboratively and effectively in supervision, designing a supervision contract, selecting supportive teaching interventions, developing competencies, and designing treatment plans.

At the mature phase, the emphasis is on increasing the individual nature of the relationship and promoting social bonding. As the roles of supervisor and supervisee become less distinct, trainees develop skills of case conceptualization, increase their levels of self-confidence, and are willing to explore personal issues as they relate to professional performance.

The termination phase reflects a greater collaborative working structure. Trainees understand the linkage between theory and practice in greater depth, and there is less need for direction from the supervisor. This is the time for a summative evaluation process, including a discussion of the meaning of termination and the feelings and thoughts associated with it. Time is also allocated for discussion of future professional development and goals.

## **6.5 Essential elements of the supervisor–supervisee relationship**

Based on his therapeutic working alliance (TWA) model, Bordin (1983), proposed the ‘supervision working alliance’ (SWA) model in 1983, which consisted of three core elements: mutually agreed upon goals and tasks, and the bond or intimacy between supervisor-supervisee as they worked together towards the same goals. He also emphasised the importance of rupture and repair factors of the alliance as they play an essential role in its development and maintenance. A strong working alliance (WA) is one of the most important aspects of successful supervision and viewed this concept as pantheoretical (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014). This means that, a strong SWA is a model that supervisees can use in building the therapeutic working relationships with their clients. For example, how the various elements of the SR are addressed by the supervisor, can be used/paralleled by supervisees as they arise in client sessions (Borders & Brown, 2005; Corey et al., 2010).

The elements include establishing trust and a safe environment, encouraging self-disclosure, identifying transference and countertransference, examining diversity issues, and establishing appropriate boundaries.

### Trust

Trust is best defined as being able to rely on another with a certain sense of predictability. In everyday relationships, trust takes time to develop. People must learn that they can rely on how others will act and react. In the supervisory relationship, trust is essential because both supervisor and supervisee need to be honest with each other. Borders (2005) stated that it is essential for the supervisor to create a safe, trusting, challenging, and open environment. Drawing on the ideas formulated by object-relations theorist D. W. Winnicott (1960), Jeffrey Barnett emphasized the importance of establishing a safe “holding” environment in supervision, a place

where supervisees feel safe and free to explore, share, and experiment with new ideas and strategies. Supervisors would do well to discuss with supervisees what they both can do to create a trusting supervisory relationship.

Supervisors might encourage their supervisees to bring up any concerns they have about trust during the supervisory sessions. Of course, how a supervisor responds when supervisees disclose their anxieties pertaining to trust will affect supervisees' openness to such discussions in the future and may lead them to play it safe if the supervisor conveys a judgmental or untrustworthy tone.

### Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure refers to the willingness of both supervisor and supervisee to be open to and discuss all issues that may arise in the supervisory relationship. For the supervisor, self-disclosure of personal issues and experiences should occur only as it provides something constructive for the supervisee regarding the topic at hand. The purpose of the supervisory session is not to provide an arena for supervisors to resolve personal issues or vent complaints about their job. The focus should be on the supervisee.

Generally, the more free supervisees are to self-disclose thoughts, fears, hopes, and expectations regarding the work they are doing, the more valuable the supervisory sessions will be. This level of openness is built on a foundation of trust.

Self-disclosure by the supervisor can be beneficial if done in a timely and appropriate manner. In their study of supervisory style and its relation to the supervisory working alliance and supervisor self-disclosure, Ladany, Walker, and Melincoff (2001) concluded that supervisors' interpersonal supervisory style can affect their ability to mutually agree on goals and tasks with their supervisees. Campbell (2006), suggested that supervisors consider incorporating self-disclosure into their supervisory style as a method for building an emotional bond and a working alliance with supervisees.

It might well be that supervisors' appropriate and timely self-disclosure facilitates supervisees' self-disclosure, especially when supervisors are willing to disclose their own struggles as counselors (Borders, 2005). Perhaps the most important kind of self-disclosure in the supervisory relationship is for the supervisor to initiate a discussion pertaining to the quality of their relationship. Immediacy is as important in the supervisor-supervisee relationship as it is in the counselor-client relationship. Borders (2005) pointed out that there is some evidence that supervisors avoid discussing difficult relationship issues with their supervisees. Thus it appears that greater attention to the relationship dynamics is warranted in the supervisory process.

Transference and Countertransference Transference: This is a psychodynamic term defined as the client's unconscious shifting to the therapist of feelings and fantasies, both positive and negative, that are displacements from reactions to significant others from the client's past (Corey, 2009). In the supervisory relationship, a supervisee may transfer those feelings and fantasies to the supervisor. It is common for supervisees to begin to idealize their supervisor because of the help and support that they receive and because of their own feelings of insecurity and incompetence. If supervisees have unresolved authority issues, these may play out in the supervisory relationship in the form of resistance. The role of the supervisor in such instances is to be aware of transference reactions and to assist their supervisees in developing their own sense of competence and problem-solving ability. It would be a mistake, in our opinion, to challenge supervisees directly and forcefully about their transference issues.

A trusting climate and encouragement by the supervisor will enable supervisees to discuss any of their reactions that may affect their ability to be open during supervisory sessions. For example, a supervisee may be anxious about "doing well" for the supervisor, and this anxiety can result in the supervisee carefully monitoring and silently rehearsing what he or she says during supervision sessions. If this supervisee takes the risk of disclosing his or her need to be seen in a positive light by the supervisor, the supervisee has already taken a significant step toward becoming more authentic in the supervisor's presence.

Countertransference refers to the reactions therapists have toward their clients that are likely to interfere with their objectivity (Corey, 2009). Countertransference on the part of the supervisor is common. Unresolved personal issues, and sometimes even problem areas that have been worked through, can be triggered through interactions with supervisees. It is critical for the supervisor to be self-aware, identifying any countertransference that may arise and understanding how it is affecting the supervisory relationship. Ethically, supervisors are expected to identify and deal with their reactions through their own supervision, consultation, or personal therapy so that their supervisees are not negatively affected in the supervisory relationship.

Examples of countertransference reactions include the arousal of guilt or anxiety from unresolved personal problems, experiencing an impasse with a supervisee and frustration over not making progress, and impatience with a supervisee (Norcross & Guy, 2007). Other common countertransference reactions toward the supervisee include an intense need to help and rescue the supervisee or a dislike of the supervisee. If the supervisor has a need to discuss his or her countertransference reactions, we recommend as a first step consulting with colleagues rather than with the supervisee. Talking about the supervisor's countertransference issues directly with the supervisee may be overwhelming for the person, just as a client might be surprised by a therapist's disclosures pertaining to counter transference. The supervisee has enough to deal with in learning to become a competent clinician.

After discussing countertransference reactions with a colleague, however, it may be appropriate and useful for the supervisor to share and explore some aspects of his or her reactions with the supervisee. Borders and Brown (2005) suggested that the developmental level of the supervisee is a factor to consider when deciding whether to address transference and countertransference reactions directly with the supervisee.

## Diversity Issues

A discussion of the differences between a supervisor and his or her supervisee should be incorporated into supervision sessions. Most codes of ethics call for supervisors to demonstrate knowledge of individual differences with respect to age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, spiritual preference, sexual orientation, and disability. Furthermore, supervisors need to understand how these contextual factors influence supervisory relationships.

Writers and researchers in multicultural supervision have emphasized the supervisor's responsibility for introducing cultural variables into the supervisory dialogue throughout the supervisory relationship (Borders, 2005). Holloway (1999), a proponent of the contextual approach to supervision, identified the following characteristics of the supervisee as being particularly important: the trainee's cultural experience, gender, cognitive and ego development, professional identity, experience level in counseling, theoretical orientation to counseling, and self-presentation. Addressing these dimensions lays the foundation for effective learning to occur within supervision.

Supervisors can teach their supervisees to respect the role that diversity plays in the counseling relationship by making supervision a multicultural experience in which race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religion, gender, and age are discussed. Because of the power dynamics inherent in the supervisory relationship, it is the supervisor's responsibility to serve as the catalyst for facilitating discussions about diversity issues. Too often supervisors emphasize client similarities and minimize racial and cultural differences. If supervisees do not understand the cultural context in which their clients live, they will not be able to effectively work with their clients. There is a price to be paid for ignoring racial and ethnic factors in supervision.

If supervisors do not address these factors as they become relevant, this will certainly weaken the trust level on the part of supervisees. Supervisors can do a great deal to create an open climate that fosters honesty in the supervisory relationship. Supervisors can model curiosity about the supervisee's differences and be eager to learn from the supervisee as well. To do so, however, it is essential that supervisors possess specific multicultural competencies. Regardless of the specific aspect of diversity that is characteristic of a supervisory relationship, any factor that influences the interpersonal relationship should be a topic of discussion.

### Appropriate Boundaries

It is common to enjoy the collegiality of the supervisory relationship, to become friendly with a supervisee, and to extend the relationship beyond the sessions, especially as the supervisee matures professionally. How far can the boundary be extended while the relationship remains ethical and professional? Supervisors need to think about the ramifications whenever they consider extending the boundaries of the supervisory relationship. Supervisors must take full responsibility for determining the limits of the relationship and take action when they believe the boundaries are becoming less clear or when expanding the boundaries is adversely affecting the supervisory task.

When boundaries are crossed or extended, there should be a good rationale for doing so. However, there is a difference between a boundary crossing and a boundary violation, with the latter being a serious violation of legal or ethical standards. A boundary crossing should have little potential to harm the supervisee; in fact, extending the boundaries should have a good chance of benefiting the supervisee or the supervisory relationship.

### Personal and Interpersonal Issues in Supervision

The relationship between supervisor and supervisee is the foundation for the work that will occur in supervision. There are common denominators between the counseling process and the supervision process. Supervision is an educative process, and the supervisee is learning specific knowledge and skills. However, for optimum learning to occur, a solid working relationship between supervisor and supervisee is essential.

### Personal variables

The importance of supervisors being aware of the many personal variables that may affect the supervisory relationship. These include values, attitudes, beliefs, age, gender, ethnicity, and spirituality, to name a few.

The impact of similarities and differences between the supervisor and supervisee is relevant to explore in supervision. Our values and attitudes affect the supervision that we provide. Even though we may believe we are objective and will not impose our personal values on supervisees, they may come through in many subtle ways.

Some values that may affect the supervisory process are rooted in personal beliefs about religion, abortion, marriage and divorce, sexual orientation, parenting, spirituality, the change process, suicide, and end-of-life decisions. Value-free supervision is virtually impossible. The key for supervisors is to be aware of their own values and attitudes and how they affect their ability to supervise.

It is not necessary for the supervisor and supervisee to have similar attitudes and beliefs for supervision to be effective, but it is a good idea for supervisors to initiate dialogue about similarities and differences as they emerge. Modeling the exploration of values helps supervisees learn how to do the same with their clients. Some supervisors think they can work with any supervisee regardless of value differences that might occur. Others are too quick to discontinue supervision when differences occur and refer the supervisee to another supervisor.

Ultimately, most value differences in supervision can be worked on within the supervisory relationship. Assuming the supervisor is cognizant of the clash of values, differences need to be discussed openly and frankly, and conflicts need to be identified. If it is determined that the value conflict will create an impasse in the supervisory relationship, plans should be made to seek a mediator or to refer the supervisee to another supervisor (Campbell, 2006).

### Power and Authority

Power is the ability to influence or control others, whereas authority is the right to do so. The supervisory relationship by definition has a built-in power differential—the supervisor in the supervisory relationship is the authority figure in the relationship (Bogo & Dill, 2008; Kadushin & Harkness, 2002).

Even though person-centered and feminist models of supervision are based on the assumption that supervisors will do what they can to minimize the power differential and to establish a collaborative relationship, there is still an inherent difference in power. Supervisors continually evaluate the work of the supervisee and provide that evaluative information to licensing boards, prospective employers, and other requestors long after the supervisory relationship has ended. Because the supervisee has relatively less power in the supervisory relationship, supervisors are responsible to clearly inform their supervisees of the evaluative structure of the relationship, the expectancies and goals for supervision, the criteria for evaluation, and the limits of confidentiality in supervision (Holloway, 1999).

Self-monitoring is important so that power and authority, which are an inherent part of the supervisory role, are used in an ethical and constructive manner. In contrast to supervisors who have a strong need to be in control at all times and impress their trainees with their vast knowledge and wisdom, supervisors who use their power and

authority appropriately may empower their trainees to take necessary risks and develop professional autonomy without feeling threatened.

Parallel process interactions between supervisor and supervisee may offer insights into the way the supervisee relates to clients. This idea, called parallel process, has its conceptual roots in psychoanalytic supervision (Borders & Brown, 2005). Searles (1955) and Ekstein and Wallerstein (1972) were among the earliest to describe this phenomenon. A popular concept, parallel process has been explored by Loganbill et al. (1982), Stoltenberg and Delworth (1987). Because certain aspects of the relationship between the supervisee and his or her client may be paralleled in the supervisory relationship, it is useful for supervisors and supervisees to pay attention to and explore the various manifestations of parallel process in supervision. For example, a supervisor might observe that her trainee, who is typically very confident and self-assured, becomes unsure of herself and appears helpless as she processes the case of a needy and childlike client. Sharing this observation with her could lead the trainee to gain valuable insights about the dynamics of the counseling process with that particular client. Although parallel process in the psychodynamic sense may not always occur, a number of parallels between counseling and supervision are readily observable.

When a supervisee recognizes similarities between the roles of and processes experienced by counselor trainees and clients, he or she is noticing a parallel. For instance, just as trainees must increase their self-awareness to enhance their counseling skills and competence, clients are encouraged to increase their self-awareness to improve the quality of their lives and resolve issues. In addition, just as counseling students may find the process of training to be emotionally intense at times, they must remember that clients are likely to find the process of counseling to be emotionally intense at times too.

Both trainees and clients must take interpersonal risks if they wish to grow, and both must invest a lot of hard work and effort into their respective undertakings to make progress. Clients must be motivated to change in order to achieve their treatment goals, just as trainees must be motivated to do what it takes to achieve competence. Trainees should develop strong personal and professional boundaries through the training process, and learning to set healthier boundaries through the counseling process may be an important goal for clients. Parallel process in psychotherapy supervision and parallels between counseling and supervision can be the focus for potent interventions within the supervisory relationship. Supervisors need to pay close attention to this process to facilitate effective supervision as well as to encourage the personal and professional growth of supervisees (McNeill & Worthen, 1989).

These include values, attitudes, beliefs, age, gender, ethnicity, and spirituality, to name a few. The impact of similarities and differences between the supervisor and supervisee is relevant to explore in supervision. Our values and attitudes affect the supervision that we provide. Even though we may believe we are objective and will not impose our personal values on supervisees, they may come through in many subtle ways.

## **6.6 Establishing a good working relationship**

Supervision can be effective even if the supervisory relationship is not ideal, but both the supervisor and the supervisee may need to work harder to ensure that the goals of supervision are accomplished.

- Treat supervisees with respect; be open and honest about what you do and do not know.
- Work at developing a spirit of mutual trust and collaboration.

- Listen diligently to what supervisees are both saying and not saying, and try to tune into their fears, struggles, and hopes.
- Have a clear understanding of the purpose and the limits of the supervisory relationship.
  - Be willing to seek consultation when you are unfamiliar with the topic under discussion.
  - Be clear on the boundaries of the relationship. Guarding against imposition of your values.
  - Work on having a clear understanding of your values, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the range of typical issues that come up in supervision.
  - Discuss with your supervisees their values and beliefs.
  - Talk openly about how values and beliefs affect the supervisory relationship and supervisees' work
  - Initiate discussions with supervisees regarding their values about marriage and divorce, family values, cultural diversity, sexual orientation, religion and spirituality, suicide, child rearing, and violence.

## **6.7 Summary**

We have discussed Supervisory relationship. Components and essential elements, personal and interpersonal issues and power and authority of supervisory relationship.

## **6.8 Further Reading**

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