

Developing Counsellor Supervision



Series Editor: Windy Dryden

Colin Feltham & Windy Dryden



DEVELOPING COUNSELLOR SUPERVISION

Developing Counselling, edited by Windy Dryden, is an innovative series of books which provides counsellors and counselling trainees with practical hints and guidelines on the problems they face in the counselling process. The books assume that readers have a working knowledge of the approach in question, and, in a clear and accessible fashion show how the counsellor can more effectively translate that knowledge into everyday practice.

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Colin Feltham and Windy Dryden



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Introduction

Like its companion volumes, this book is addressed primarily to those practitioners who have some experience in the field. However, it should also be of interest to counsellor trainees who have a need to know what is involved in supervision and to counsellors who may be intending to train as supervisors. As well as being aimed at beginning supervisors, we hope that experienced supervisors may find certain features of the book useful. We assume that readers come from a variety of theoretical persuasions, work in a great many settings and are exposed to a variety of influences and demands. We have addressed the book mainly to those engaged in one-to-one supervision of individual counselling but pointers may be extrapolated for group and peer supervision and for the supervision of couple and group counselling.

Counsellor supervision has begun to receive close attention within the last few years. Although it has always been understood as an ethical and professional necessity for practising counsellors, supervision in Britain has not been researched, understood and presented on training courses as adequately as it might have been. Relatively little literature and training material has appeared here, although what has is stimulating (see for example, Mattinson, 1975; Inskip and Proctor, 1989; Hawkins and Shohet, 1989). Since counsellor training in Britain still predominantly follows the historical influence of the psychoanalytic and person-centred traditions, what has been written and what is presented in supervision training often emulates these influences. We hope in this book to bring some balance from the eclectic, integrative and cognitive-behavioural orientations which have been steadily gaining ground in Britain.

Comprehensive American accounts of supervision theory and practice may be found in Hess (1980); Bradley (1989); and Bernard and Goodyear (1992). An excellent concise account of the history of and research into supervision is given by Holloway (1992). It is our intention to present here a variety of practical approaches to supervision culled from different models of counselling, which readers may consider and use eclectically, as befits their own situation. We have included certain material as Appendices which we ourselves have found helpful as supervisors,

and we have made a significant number of references to the supervision literature.

It is important from the outset to give thought to the question of what supervision is and is not, and why it is viewed, for example by the British Association for Counselling, as a *sine qua non* of the practising counsellor's professional life. Unfortunately the term 'supervision' still carries connotations of managerial oversight and control, mistrust and coercion of the worker by an employer. This is, of course, a long way from its meaning in a counselling context, where it applies to a professional, consultative, supportive aid for counsellors. Although supervision does indeed have a rather sober ethical dimension, safeguarding clients from potential abuse by counsellors, it also aims to promote effective counselling by assisting counsellors in their professional development. From the training supervision of beginning counsellors through to the collegial consultation of experienced practitioners, supervision is dedicated to helping clients by helping their counsellors. Supervision is always, ultimately, focused on helping the client, even if this sometimes entails spending time examining counsellors' and supervisors' own feelings and interpersonal dynamics.

One of the first lessons for supervisors to learn is to distinguish between supervision and counselling. Every supervisor must have a first session in the role of supervisor, which may be somewhat unnerving. There is no way of avoiding such experiences or making them easier, even when trainee supervisees may have role-played supervision sessions before actually commencing work as a supervisor. In some ways, then, supervision recapitulates the first-hand learning of beginning counsellors. Supervision can, however, feel at first like counselling at one remove, attempting to help the counsellor to help an initially distant client. The first steps in supervision can feel awkward as you try to become quickly accustomed to your new role in relation to the supervisee and in relation to the (now distant) client. Because of this natural awkwardness, it is understandable that many beginning supervisors may unwittingly find themselves counselling their supervisees. Another understandable faltering first step is to emulate one's own supervisors. We mention these experiences to underscore the fact that no training course or book can substitute for learning from direct and sometimes 'painful' experience in the 'deep end'.

We hope that this small book will assist in the development of counsellor supervision in its diverse settings, thus improving the services offered to clients. We anticipate that interesting trends

within the counselling world, for example the provision of counselling in employee assistance programmes and GPs' surgeries, will generate demands for greater effectiveness and accountability, and that this will in turn place greater demands on supervisors and trainers.

Colin Feltham
Windy Dryden

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Appendix 1 Presenting a client for supervision. Ian Horton (1993) 'Supervision', in R. Bayne and P. Nicolson (eds) *Counselling and Psychology for Health Professionals*. London: Chapman and Hall. Reprinted by permission of Chapman and Hall.

Appendix 2 BAC Code of Ethics and Practice for the Supervision of Counsellors (1988). Reprinted by permission of the British Association for Counselling.

Appendix 3 Therapist intentions. C. Hill and K.E. O'Grady (1985) 'List of therapist intentions illustrated in a case study and with therapists of varying theoretical orientations'. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 32: 3-22. © 1985 Reprinted by permission of the American Psychological Association.

Appendix 4 Competencies of supervisors. ACES Supervision Interest Network; AACD Convention (2 April 1985).

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Creating a Supervisory Alliance

1

Exchange views with supervisees on supervision and initiate a mutually acceptable contract

Counsellors who approach you for supervision on a paying basis are likely to be much more knowledgeable about what is involved in negotiations relating to counselling than a client approaching a counsellor. However, some counsellors know little about supervision before receiving it. Some have been told that they must have it and do not quite understand why. This may seem surprising – and we certainly believe that any worthwhile counselling training should include explanation about the meaning, function and necessity of supervision – but such ignorance is still far from uncommon. This is, perhaps, the most fundamental reason for discovering what new supervisees understand by the term ‘supervision’.

If you supervise within a training course, perhaps in a small group of trainees who have completed some initial training, your supervisees may not ask you what supervision consists of or consider that they have any right to question you, because they may have no choice of who is supervising them: you may have been presented as a ‘course requirement’. In this situation, where supervisees apparently have little choice or room for negotiation, it is still necessary to discover what they mean by supervision and what they think they may need. Whatever restrictions you and your supervisees may be working under, there is always some room (if not a necessity, according to Bordin, 1983) for discussion and negotiation. Furthermore, it is poor practice to make assumptions, to proceed without clarification and to erode supervisees’ own power.

If you supervise within an organization, voluntary or statutory, you may be the only supervisory resource available to counsellors in that setting. In that case, they again may have no apparent choice. They will have to accept you as their supervisor, along with your style of supervision, your theoretical orientation and any organizational bias you may have. But here again, there is still

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room for explanation, discussion and negotiation. We are perhaps assuming here that all counsellor supervisors understand the need for adult, egalitarian discussion and contract-making. Whatever your organizational or assessment role may be in relation to supervisees, you cannot form a productive supervisory relationship with them on the basis of a purely authoritarian attitude. (See Section 4, however, on what attitudes supervisees may prefer at different stages of development, and consult Fisher (1989).)

We suggest that one of the very first questions you ask is 'What do you know about supervision?' You can expand on this by asking whether the person has received previous supervision, has read anything about it, has been taught anything about it or has any fantasy or anticipation of what it may involve. These questions are, of course, suitable for beginning counsellors. The less knowledge about or experience of supervision the person has, the more time you will probably need to spend exploring these fundamental issues. Do not accept facile assurances that your new supervisee understands what supervision is if you suspect that he or she is wary of admitting any ignorance or uncertainty. You may well spend an entire first session or two simply discussing the meaning and uses of supervision. It can be helpful to suggest to the supervisee that they listen to Inskipp and Proctor's (1989) audiotope *Being Supervised*, which explores these very issues. Horton (1993) provides a very useful guide for supervisees on how to present cases in supervision, which is reproduced in Appendix 1.

Depending on whether you as a supervisor have considerable or minimal supervisory experience, you may have forgotten, or still be in touch with, the high levels of anxiety that beginning counsellors often carry into their supervision. Skovholt and Ronnestad (1992a) refer to this as a 'pervasive anxiety' and argue that beginning supervisees often attempt to disguise this anxiety by appearing more confident than they really are. They may well attribute great authority to you and fail to ask the kinds of questions to which they need answers. Anticipate this by describing your outlook on supervision, your experience, theoretical orientation and any preferences for supervisory foci. Help the supervisee to question you on these and other issues. Raise the question of fees, cancellation policy, frequency of sessions, confidentiality and other boundaries. While it is not helpful to bombard supervisees with these issues, they do need to be discussed in a first session. Some issues may not become apparent until work begins (for example, conflict about the use of tape-recordings, or areas in which the supervisor has no expertise) and will need to be handled clearly and honestly when they do arise.

The pervasive anxiety of the beginning supervisee may also be addressed by clarifying the extent of your assessment role, if any, as well as any organizational or even statutory responsibility you may have. The concept of 'negligent supervision' has no real teeth as yet in Britain but in the USA counsellor supervisors may be considered 'vicariously liable' in law suits for their supervisees' errors (Austin et al., 1990). If you believe, as a supervisor, that you carry particular responsibilities for your supervisees, these must be made absolutely clear to them at the outset. Vagueness may feed supervisees' anxiety (see Sections 2 and 28 for further discussion of these issues).

Let supervisees know as much about your work as they need to know and, equally, ask for the kind of information you require before committing yourself to a supervision contract. You need this information not only from individual counsellors but also from any course directors or trainers who ask you to supervise on their training courses. You must satisfy yourself that any courses or individual supervisees you are associated with meet your own standards of practice and ethics. You may want to know what previous clinical experience your new supervisee has, what level of training has been reached, what supportive networks he or she has besides you and what kinds of client groups the supervisee is working with. All these matters should be aired in a first session or sessions. Because it is not always possible to gather this information meaningfully out of context, you may invite the supervisee in a first session to describe a current case briefly, in order to afford both of you an opportunity to sample each other's needs, abilities and ways of working.

It is not too unusual to be asked urgently for supervision by counsellors who have suddenly run into difficulties and/or who have not had recent supervision. In such a case, while you may agree to take a supervisee on, do not allow his or her urgency to sweep aside the need for contractual clarity. In this and all other first meetings with supervisees, spend some time mutually examining a definition and understanding of supervision. When you have substantially covered the kinds of issues raised here, go on to formulate a working agreement. Proctor (1987) suggests that a cooperative agreement be reached, based on an understanding of accountability for counsellor effectiveness, counsellor self-responsibility, supervisor responsibility and the willingness of both supervisor and counsellor to develop and maintain their respective skills.

The formality with which such agreements are made may vary considerably, but should ideally always include statements by the