



# STAFF SUPERVISION IN THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE



Guidance for leaders on policy and practice for staff supervision meeting new statutory guidance



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With kind permission, the following guidance draws primarily on the work of Karen John who recently produced guidance on policy and practice in staff supervision for the Pen Green Research, Development and Training Base and Leadership Centre.<sup>1</sup> It further draws on the work of Professor Chris Pascal following her input earlier this year at an introductory seminar in Bristol for Children Centre Managers and Family Support Leads on the theme of supervision.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John, K. & The Pen Green Team (2011). Staff Supervision in Children's Centres - Guidance on Policy and Practice. Corby, Northants: Pen Green Research, Training and Development Base and Leadership Centre

<sup>2</sup> Chris Pascal (2012) Developing Supervision in Children's Centres

## Introduction

The new Early Years' Foundation Stage places an increased emphasis on welfare and safeguarding standards, stipulating that regular staff supervision is now a statutory requirement. Clare Tickell's (June 2011) independent report of the review of the EYFS highlighted the role of supervision in improving practice and maintaining effective early years provision. Her recommendation for the implementation of sector-wide supervision, including childminders, underlined the need for support, performance management and continuous professional development, and this is specified within the revised EYFS.

As we strive to improve outcomes for all children and narrow the gap in achievement of vulnerable children in Bristol, 'safe' practices and the effective management of staff performance and well-being are of paramount importance. Comprehensive, inclusive policies and management systems for safeguarding practices must therefore include the regular supervision of all staff.

## Context

As from September 2012, the new Early Years Foundation Stage sets out a statutory requirement that all early years' settings have arrangements for staff supervision in place. This highlights the importance of good supervisory practice throughout the EYFS in the context of a supportive professional culture to ensure the highest standards of safeguarding for both children and staff.

'Providers **must** put appropriate arrangements in place for the supervision of staff who have contact with children and families. Effective supervision provides support, coaching and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of children. Supervision should foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork and continuous improvement which encourages the confidential discussion of sensitive issues.'

'Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:

- discuss any issues – particularly concerning children's development or well-being;
- identify solutions to address issues as they arise, and;
- receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness'

*EYFS Safeguarding and Welfare Requirements 3:19 & 3:20*

Professionally, staff supervision has been a normal part of counselling, psychotherapy and social work practice and is increasingly to be found in related caring professions, including medicine, nursing, education and children's services. At a time of heightened awareness of safeguarding issues, there is increasing recognition that working in the early years includes a high degree of outreach work and contact with families. Many practitioners find themselves working in unfamiliar

contexts and dealing with unpredictable issues. The need for keeping practice and practitioners 'safe' is a priority.<sup>3</sup>



### **What is supervision?**

Practitioners often manage increasingly complex issues in their intensive work with children and families. They can feel anxious, discouraged or overwhelmed, lose confidence and perspective, feel threatened and unable to cope with the demands of their jobs. Even when things are going well, there is a need to step away from the day-to-day demands and review and reflect on practice.

Supervision provides a regular, dedicated time (approx. 1-1.5 hours) for 1-1 or small group reflection and discussion. Commonly, supervision is organised over a 6-weekly cycle. The following definition recognises supervision as a core process by which those with leadership and management responsibilities regularly provide support and challenge to ensure and improve the quality of their services

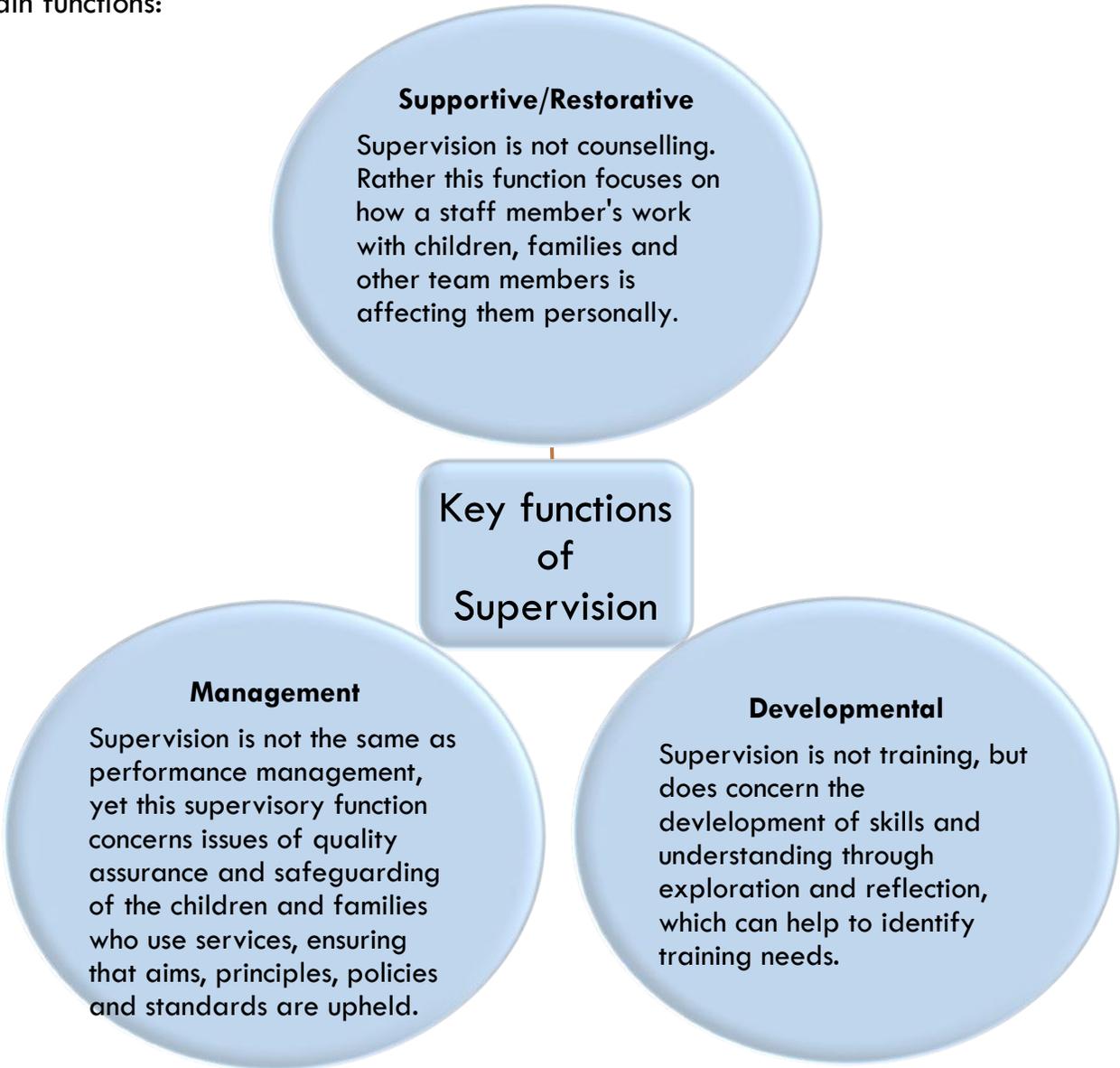
*'Staff supervision is a two-way process which promotes accountability and staff support and development. Both parties should be committed to making supervision worthwhile, positive, honest, objective and unbiased. The needs of the individual, the project or department where they work and the organization as a whole should all be taken into account. Parties should be fair and open and promote equality and trust. Supervision should be a positive experience for all and take place regularly. If managers are not supervising their staff, they are omitting a key function of management.'*

*Developing Supervision in Children's Centres, Chris Pascal (2012)*

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<sup>3</sup> Chris Pascal (2012) Developing Supervision in Children's Centres

Supervision fulfills the following three main functions:



### **Supportive working cultures**

Critically, supervision should take place in the context of a supportive professional culture built on trust and respect, recognising the influence and impact of establishing good working relationships. In relation to safeguarding, there needs to be recognition of the need to provide a 'safe' space to 'hold' the strong emotions that are sometimes aroused by issues that arise in efforts to protect children. This also applies to everyday, often personal issues presented by staff, impacting on their well-being and effectiveness. Such scenarios require emotionally intelligent leaders and managers who confidently offer opportunities for open, honest reflection and demonstrate commitment to supporting supervisees in finding ways forward.

It is, however, recognised that early years practitioners may feel uncomfortable with the term 'supervision', which seems to imply being overseen, and this can evoke fear of being under surveillance, at risk of being judged or deemed inadequate in some way. Whilst management is one of the three key functions of supervision, research suggests that good performance is more likely when a manager is respectful, assumes a collegial stance and comes alongside the staff member, inviting them to review their work and discuss any pressing issues - suggesting that together they might achieve a clearer and wider perspective (Hamlin & Sawyer, 2007), ultimately enabling '**super-VISION**'.<sup>4</sup>

*'Of all the relationships we have at work, the one with our boss or supervisor has the greatest impact on our emotional and physical health.'*

### **Good practice in supervision**

Effective staff supervision is commonly characterised by the following features. Settings may wish to consider these as supervision standards and include them in a staff supervision agreement. (An example proforma for a Staff Supervision Agreement is shown in **APPENDIX 1**)

#### **i. Confidentiality**

Issues of trust need to be thoroughly explored and the importance of confidentiality emphasized.

Supervision should include a joint commitment to openness and clarity about what may be treated as confidential by both parties (or a supervision group) Any matters discussed in a supervision meeting can be treated as confidential when it is agreed that it is unnecessary to discuss them elsewhere. However, openness requires all parties to be sensitive to those occasions when difficult issues will have to be discussed elsewhere, and to be transparent about when and why this will be necessary and how it will be done.

#### **ii. Commitment to preparation** for supervision by both supervisor and supervisee, including a review of previous actions and consideration of points for discussion. The structure of the agenda can be jointly agreed by both parties at the beginning of each meeting, allowing prioritisation of topics and flexibility to reflect current needs. Topics for discussion may include:

- review of last supervision and tasks undertaken
- positive feedback and recognition
- professional development and training
- project updates
- individual children's progress
- interactions with families, colleagues and



<sup>4</sup> Karen John (2012) Nursery World

- other professionals
- safeguarding issues, as necessary
- equality and diversity issues
- general health and safety issues
- budget management
- working schedules
- annual leave

However, all topics cannot be covered each time and will need to be jointly prioritised at the beginning of supervision sessions.

- iii. **Agreed frequency and duration of meetings** – staff supervision is often planned on a 6 weekly cycle for each member of the team. (This maybe on an individual or group basis) Supervision is effective when meetings are scheduled in advance and timings are not changed. Meetings held at a time and venues agreed by both parties with an approximate duration of 1- 1.5 hours are recommended.
- iv. **Appropriate physical environment for supervision**  
Supervision should normally take place in an agreed confidential, comfortable setting where interruptions are minimized.
- v. **Recording a supervision meeting**  
The prompt recording of supervision sessions is necessary to provide an accurate record of decisions made and actions required. Often the supervisor takes responsibility for documenting the discussion during the session, formally agreeing actions at the end and providing the supervisee with a record shortly following the meeting. Any safeguarding decisions will be clearly stated and recorded in case files (in accordance with safeguarding standards) The supervisee will check the notes upon receipt and send any additions/amendments to the supervisor. In line with data protection, the supervisor is responsible for the safe storage of supervision records.
- vi. **Supervision ratios**  
A full-time member of staff with line management responsibilities ideally line manages no more than 7 members of staff, and their workload needs to reflect the time required for this. The drawing up of a team supervisory relationship chart, detailing who is supervised by whom will help to ensure that the staff supervision standards are upheld.
- vii. **Supervision of volunteers**  
Volunteers need to take part in regular supervision in line with their role and hours of work.
- viii. **Training**  
Supervision training is essential for all those leading or undertaking supervision. Training will include general supervision skills and detailed information for using standards and documentation.

ix. **Quality assurance**

Regular monitoring and evaluation of supervision is the responsibility of setting leaders to ensure impact and alignment with development priorities and compliance with safeguarding policy.

**What will Ofsted expect to be in place?**

Ofsted will expect each setting to have a Supervision policy. Through interviews and discussion with staff, Ofsted will wish to discuss procedures in place to ensure that high quality supervision is provided and has an **impact** on practice.

As cited in the Ofsted Evaluation Schedule for the Inspection of Children’s Centres, inspectors should consider *‘the extent to which adults feel safe, employ safe working practices and have the knowledge and understanding to enable them to take responsibility for their own safety and well-being.’* (p13)

The Ofsted Evaluation Schedule for Inspections of Registered Early Years Provision cites, *‘High-quality professional supervision, based on consistently and sharply focused evaluations of the impact of staff’s practice’* as a feature of ‘outstanding’ leadership and management. (p14)



**Models of supervision**

Supervision meetings can take the form of individual or group meetings.. As a general rule, the more responsibility the job carries for making decisions which affect other people (children, staff, families), the more access there should be to individual supervision. Setting leaders are responsible for ensuring that staff who normally receive group supervision will also have a minimum of two individual supervision meetings annually.

Most staff supervision within early years settings is provided through the line management structure, however, decisions need to be taken regarding the need for external supervision. This is an important issue for early years’ settings in view of the fact that the integration of services and inter-professional working are central features of how services are organised. Depending on professional heritages, line managers may not have appropriate experience of a staff member’s specialist area of work and may need to access external support to provide supervision of a more clinical nature (eg social care, counseling, speech and language therapy, infant mental health)

The following illustrate different models of supervision (not an exhaustive list)



### **Model Supervision Policy**

To support settings in embedding supervision practices, a model policy is attached. This includes extracts and example proformas from Karen John and the Pen Green team's guidance on supervision.

**\*As with all policies, a supervision policy needs to be drawn up with the involvement and support of all members of staff for its effective implementation. This will be essential in establishing a collective understanding of the scope and role of supervision and how it links with existing appraisal and performance management policies.\***

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## MODEL SUPERVISION POLICY

### Rationale

The new Early Years' Foundation Stage (September 2012) places an increased emphasis on welfare and safeguarding standards, stipulating that regular staff supervision is now a statutory requirement. As we strive to improve outcomes for all children and families, and narrow the gap in achievement of vulnerable children, safe systems and the effective management of staff performance and well-being are of prime importance.

Professionally, staff supervision has been a normal part of counselling, psychotherapy and social work practice and is increasingly to be found in related caring professions. At a time of heightened awareness of safeguarding issues, there is increasing recognition that working in the early years includes a high degree of outreach work and contact with families. Many practitioners find themselves working in unusual contexts and dealing with unpredictable and sometimes extreme issues. The need for keeping practice and practitioners 'safe' is a priority. If early years practitioners are to provide the kind of encouragement and support necessary for the support, development and challenge of children and families, they need to be encouraged, supported and challenged as well.

**Context** (*Managers may wish to add contextual information here specific to their setting*)

### Purpose

- To develop confidence, and increase skills, insight and courage when working with children, parents and communities.
- To establish and maintain a positive and co-operative working relationship between leaders and staff, built on trust, respect and a non-judgemental style
- To provide a reflective and safe space that encourages a dynamic interaction to address issues and dilemmas experienced by staff members in their work roles
- To reduce stress-related absences, and increase confidence in dealing with complex safeguarding and other dilemmas.
- To ensure organisational and staff accountability and development, thereby promoting reflective, creative, ethical and safe practice.
- To ensure staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities, and that their practice is consistent with setting's values, policies, procedures and quality standards
- To monitor progress in relation to appraisal objectives
- To identify and review personal development needs and activities for staff that relate to their roles and the needs of the setting
- To model a preferred way of working and relating, which can be transferred to other working relationships

**What does this look like in practice?**

- Each member of staff will have a supervisor – this will usually be the member of the leadership team that supports their Performance Management.
- Supervision will be in addition to Performance Management, be face-to-face, and take place in a setting private and free from disturbance.
- Supervision will be on a 6 weekly basis – but the frequency may change depending on circumstances, such as complex child protection issues – and supervision sessions will last between 45 mins -1.5 hrs.
- Supervisors will establish a shared view of supervision, including ways in which staff members have felt supported in the past and what they have found useful/less useful. A setting-wide Staff Supervision Agreement will be put in place. (*Appendix 1 provides an example proforma for a Staff Supervision Agreement*)
- All supervision is recorded by the supervisor, shared with the supervisee and stored.
- An agreed Staff Supervision Record form will be used to capture discussion points and decisions made. (*Appendix 2 provides an example proforma for a Staff Supervision Record form*)
- - Safeguarding decisions will be clearly stated and will be recorded in the child's individual file by the staff member/key person.
  - The Supervision Record will be printed and given to the staff member at the end of the session or within 5 working days.
  - The staff member will check the notes and complete any amendments, returning the record to the supervisor.
  - At the next supervision session, both parties will *formally* agree the notes of the previous meeting, and this agreement will be recorded in the next meeting notes.
  - During every supervision meeting, it is essential that both the supervisor and supervisee make a note of decisions made and actions required, and these actions are formally agreed at the end of the meeting.
- Supervision notes/records will be stored securely in individual staff records, move with the employee if they take up another post within Bristol, and be kept for one year after a member of staff leaves the setting.

**Supervision structure** (*Managers may wish to include a diagram showing the line-management/supervision management structure in their setting*)

- Supervision of students will be by their practice educator.
- Supervision of volunteers will be in line with this policy.

## **Roles and responsibilities**

### **Supervisors need to:**

- 
- Ensure that staff members receive the appropriate amount and regularity of supervision. This may vary according to roles and hours worked
  - Avoid postponing supervision sessions. Where cancellation is unavoidable, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to arrange an alternative time as near as possible to the original time.
  - Arrange a suitably private venue free from disturbances.
  - Be prepared to challenge and to give and receive constructive feedback.

#### **Supervisees need to:**

- Value the importance of supervision and contribute to an effective process.
- Prepare for, attend and actively contribute to supervision meetings.
- Act on decisions made in supervision.
- Be open to challenge and to receive and give constructive feedback.

#### **Training and Development**

Supervision training will be completed by all members of staff and will include general supervision skills and information for using standards and documentation.

#### **Supervision of supervision**

The supervisor's task is a complex and vital one. It is necessary that their own ongoing supervision arrangements include agreed space to talk about the supervision they offer. The provision of specific supervision of their supervisory practice will require consideration. (*Models of practice across Bristol, eg supervision support provided by area-based Early Intervention Social Workers to be disseminated through future training*)

#### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Supervision practices will be quality assured in line with the monitoring and evaluation policy. Outcomes to be reported to governors/management committee.

## APPENDIX 1 - Staff Supervision Agreement

Supervisor:

Supervisee:

*The supervision arrangements we have agreed are as follows:*

How often we will meet

Where we will meet

How long each session will last

Who will make a record of what was discussed

What we will do to try to make sure we don't get interrupted

Who will make a record of what was discussed/agreed

Where the supervision records will be kept

How we will/will not use the supervision records

Who else may see the supervision records

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**In supervision we will:**

- Begin by agreeing what we need to talk about
- Spend a few minutes finding out if you are okay and how you are feeling
- Check that the notes of the last meeting were accurate
- Make sure that, as far as possible, we have done the things we agreed to do last time
- Review your work through discussion, reports and observation, including Safeguarding children and adults which will include:
  - time for reflection on your experience and feelings about work and relationships
  - discussion and feedback on the work you have been doing
  - agreement on future actions
  - talk about your skills, knowledge and experience and development needs
  - provide an opportunity for you to feedback on your experience/expectations of supervision
  - confirm the date of the next meeting
  -

There will only be interruptions if...

Signed  
(Supervisee)

Signed  
(Supervisor)

## APPENDIX 2 - Staff Supervision Record Form

*The Staff Supervision Record is designed to ensure that key areas are considered in supervision so that supervisor and supervisee are protected in the working relationship. Not every section needs to be covered during every session. However, it is recommended that each session begins with an open slot (welcome) and ends with a summary discussion and evaluation of the session (ending), including identifying the date of the next meeting.*

Name of Supervisor:
Name of Supervisee:
Team:
Date:
<b>Welcome:</b> <i>How staff member is generally, what's been happening or pre-occupying the staff member – an easing into supervision. Review of last supervision session.</i>
<b>Main responsibilities:</b> <i>This relates to day-to-day work and priorities and should provide opportunities to discuss successes and challenges. This area will take up a substantial portion of each session as it provides an opportunity to discuss specific work with children and families and practice development.</i>
<b>Relationships:</b> <i>with staff members, children and families and other work contacts.</i>
<b>Overall context of service:</b> <i>discussion of service development, planning, progress, budget and any assistance required.</i>
<b>Appraisal objectives:</b> <i>discussion of progress and supported required, including training.</i>
<b>Meetings:</b> <i>this relates to preparation and review of all varieties of meetings held.</i>
<b>Health, welfare and safety:</b> <i>this includes general health and safety issues, as well as welfare issues which could include issues around stress, race, disability, sexuality, gender, religion and age. Attendance and time-keeping can be discussed here.</i>
<b>Personal Development:</b> <i>includes discussion of activities that will help/have helped the supervisee to develop themselves into their role and service. This may include working with other colleagues and experts, training or other activities.</i>
<b>Ending:</b> <i>this is about establishing how a staff member feels at the end of supervision and an ongoing opportunity for the staff member to constructively feedback any issues raised. Staff members are encouraged to make reasonable and realistic suggestions about how their supervisor could support them better.</i>