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**Critical Reflection/Supervision in Safeguarding Children**

**KSCP Multi-Agency Guidance Notes**

1. **Introduction and purpose of this guidance**

Child protection by its very nature involves risk assessment with its own inherent challenges and concerns. Many agencies and organisations deal with child protection on an occasional basis, and this can lead to practitioners and their managers being unsure and feeling unsupported when dealing with these kinds of cases. Supervision helps to address some of these risks and enables agencies to develop a workforce that is confident, assertive, and challenging, with practitioners who can critically reflect on their experiences and learn from them.

Many agencies already have safeguarding supervision embedded in their practice; others are looking to introduce a framework for supervision. This guidance will help organisations ensure their supervision has the essential elements to support their workforce in keeping children safe.

Whilst formal, one to one supervision may not be appropriate in all settings; there will be discussions with practitioners when there are concerns about children. These discussions are crucial in keeping children safe and will benefit from the type of questions outlined in this guidance.

Key messages from research, and national reports and guidance all support the need for good safeguarding practice to be subject to critical discussion and reflection. This guidance has drawn upon that research and will help those engaged in work with children and families in Kirklees to work towards this.

This guidance contains some key principles for effective practice in safeguarding children and young people and some tools and models that managers and practitioners can use in critical reflection and supervision.

1. **Key Principles**

Critical Reflection/Supervision of practice in safeguarding children can take on a variety of forms including one to one, group or peer supervision or action learning. Whatever the form of supervision there are key principles which should apply and help ensure that the supervision is effective.

Critical Reflection/Safeguarding supervision should:

1. Be a shared organisational responsibility, with a clear supervision agreement between the organisation, the supervisor, and the practitioner.
2. Have a child-centred approach and ensure that the child’s daily experience is discussed and understood.
3. Be an opportunity for reflective learning leading to informed actions.
4. Be seen as an essential part of safeguarding practice, and not as an optional activity.
5. Maintain professional standards and be consistent with KSCP guidelines.
6. Ensure practitioners understand their roles and responsibility, the scope of their professional discretion and authority and their accountability in safeguarding within a multi-agency context.
7. Help identify learning and development needs and promote the skills required to provide an effective service
8. Recognise the potential stresses in safeguarding practice and offer support appropriately.
9. Establish clarity regarding information sharing in the interests of children and young people.
10. Support an underpinning positive ethos of professional curiosity and professional challenge with clear parallel processes in place to expedite case escalation where necessary.
11. **Practice Guidance**

These guidance notes can be used as a checklist to help you audit safeguarding practice and achieve positive outcomes for all involved. The qualities of a ‘good’ supervisor and supervisee identified below have come from a range of literature on supervision.

**To be an effective safeguarding supervisor you need to:**

* Plan a joint agenda (e.g., review previous supervision notes before meeting and make a note of issues you wish to raise; invite your supervisee to do the same)
* Clarify tasks and areas of work that the supervisor expects of the practitioner
* Encourage honest and open discussion of real issues
* Hold regular sessions at agreed dates and times and be on time
* Ensure the session is uninterrupted and is comfortable
* Praise work done well; affirm and develop skills
* Listen, seek clarification, and summarise.
* Be constructive, and offer balanced feedback, focusing on the positives as well as challenges.
* Support staff and build on their existing skills and knowledge.
* Set clear targets with actions & timescales and write these down; include review of action plans and outcomes.
* Anticipate problems and issues before they get serious, e.g., in relation to resistance from service users.
* Do what you say you will do, be reliable, and be a role model for good practice.
* Be specific in any comments you make relating to practitioner’s performance.
* Convey confidence as appropriate so that the practitioner can reach new levels. Try to stretch them.
* Encourage challenge in safeguarding practice as appropriate
* Record any disagreements and identify plans to resolve them.
* Share your experience, knowledge, and skills as needed to help the practitioner.
* Ensure you do not use supervision to offload your own difficulties or pressures or solely as a workload management tool.
* Set the practitioner’s work in the context of legislative and agency requirements, signposting to relevant statute, regulations, and agency policy/procedure as appropriate
* Acknowledge conflict and tensions openly e.g., as between ‘ideal-case’ interventions and resource or budget constraints
* Acknowledge that you haven’t got ‘all the answers’ and that you are open to learning. Think who else can help with an issue
* Help staff to reflect on their practice, e.g., what worked, didn’t work, why, and lessons for the future.
* Ensure that there are Risk Assessments as well as assessment of need.
* Keep the child/young person in focus – at the centre.
* Clarify and agree rules of confidentiality within supervision

**To be an effective safeguarding practitioner you need to:**

* Co-operate with the aims of the supervisor (as above)
* Contribute to a joint agenda (e.g., review previous supervision notes before meeting and make a note of issues you wish to raise)
* Be prepared to openly discuss real issues
* Attend regular sessions at agreed dates and times and be on time
* Raise problems and issues before they get serious, e.g., in relation to resistance from service users.
* Do what you say you will do, be reliable.
* Take responsibility for your own learning and professional development, ensuring you keep up to date with developments in safeguarding via training and research evidence.
* Let the supervisor know if you feel there is inadequate guidance and support for you to fulfil your responsibilities.
* Keep the child/young person in focus – at the centre.

There is a great deal of overlap in the qualities needed to make critical reflection/ supervision work for the benefit of the child and family. Both parties must make a commitment to supervision if it is to work effectively. The supervisor and supervisee need to be fully aware of their professional responsibility and accountability.

1. **Common Barriers to the delivery and reception of effective supervision can include:**

* ‘Dumping’ – saving up criticisms and discussing them all at once.
* Unplanned, rushed agenda, and unfocussed sessions.
* Inadequate preparation by supervisor or supervisee.
* Unclear or unrealistic goals for staff members.
* Telling rather than listening.
* Failure to offer constructive commentary on performance.
* Misuse of power, e.g., bullying, harassment, victimisation.
* Allowing interruptions.
* Running out of time.
* Avoidance – not facing up to risks/difficult issues.
* Poor recording of supervision.
* Emotional issues unaddressed.
* Case management rather than supervision

1. **Good practice in Supervision:**

Use supervision to reflect on your understanding and application of knowledge, theory, and skills. Consider how this has an impact on outcomes for the service user.

Use supervision to reflect on how you promote the values of anti-oppressive practice, and meaningful user involvement and participation.

Identity should be considered routinely both in respect of the relationship between supervisor and supervisee and the relationship between the supervisee and the child/young person, family and other professionals. Considering identity helps practitioners consider wider factors that may be impacting on those that they work with and provides an opportunity to explore the impact of power, difference and diversity on their thinking and in their relationships and interactions with others.

A useful tool to support supervisors and supervisees to explore identity in supervision is the ‘social graces’, developed by John Burnham. This provides a framework for considering and exploring different aspects of identity and how these can shape our interactions, view of the world and our thinking. This model encourages consideration not only of voiced and visible aspects of identity but also unvoiced and invisible aspects and supports practitioners to consider and address resulting power differences. More information about the ‘social graces’ and some guidance as to how the model can be used in supervision and in team discussions can be found [here](https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Social-GGRRAAACCEEESSS-and-the-LUUUTT-model.pdf).

1. **Critically Reflective Practice**

The importance of critical reflection in safeguarding practice, is widely understood, and should be applied throughout our interventions with children, young people, and their families.

Supervision is the ideal forum for critical reflection providing the opportunity to consider and analyse what life is like for the child; what is the level of risk; what are the protective factors and are our interventions effective. Modelling critical reflection in supervision will encourage its application throughout practice. Critical reflection should enable us to learn from what goes well in practice and what doesn’t.

1. **Common Pitfalls in Safeguarding Practice and How to avoid them**

The below is a link to an NSPCC document, based on learning from serious case reviews. It contains useful, concise guidance on common errors in safeguarding practice. It is a helpful tool for supervision, practice development and training. It has multi-agency relevance and is pertinent to critically reflective practice. The document is from 2010 but remains relevant for practice today.

[Ten pitfalls and how to avoid them: what research tells us (embrace-learning.co.uk)](http://www.embrace-learning.co.uk/downloads/sc_readinglist/Ten_Pitfalls_and_How_to_Avoid_Them.pdf)

1. **Risk Assessment & Management**

It is widely recognised that the assessment and management of risk is central to safeguarding practice. Supervision of assessments should reflect the child’s developmental needs; parenting capacity and family/environmental factors. This informs risk assessment and management.

Almost all children on Child Protection Plans are living at home and are doing so at risk of Significant Harm. This risk must be clearly identified and understood by all involved, parents and practitioners, as they have a responsibility to manage and reduce that risk.

1. **Escalation of Concerns**

There are sometimes situations when practitioners within or between agencies will disagree about the level of need of and risk. Usually, these disagreements can be resolved through discussion and the sharing of information and knowledge. On the occasions when resolution is not achieved, it is recommended by the KSCP that the Escalation of Concerns Policy is used. This simple format ensures that managers become involved in the discussion and resolve matters in the interests of the child. All practitioners need to be aware of the policy



1. **Consideration to Multi-agency group supervision:**

Some cases may benefit from group multi-agency supervision to support a continued shared direction, joint decision making, joint risk management and continued child focus.

Multi-agency group supervision can strengthen how professionals work in a preventative and proactive way to address need, manage risk and prevent case drift.

Multi-agency group supervision does not replace single agency organisational supervision arrangements and must be viewed as an additional opportunity to engage in critical reflection and case analysis to promote the well-being of a child or young person.

Group supervision does not replace any other statutory process involving a child or young person and should be facilitated by someone independent to the case.

The decision to engage in multi-agency group supervision should be agreed as part of existing multi-agency processes and the request for a facilitator will be made by the lead professional for the case.

1. **Guidance questions and activities to assist with Supervision**

**General questions that may support Supervision**

* What would you like to happen/what do you want?
* How will you know if this piece of supervision has been helpful to you?
* What do I need to know about?
* What do you see as the main issues/your chief dilemma?
* What do you think are the main contexts influencing this situation?
* How do you understand…?
* What explanations do you have?
* How would you describe…?
* How would xxxxx view you/what is going on?
* What would xxxxxx say?
* Has there been a situation like this before?
* When xxxxx does this what does y do/how would y react?
* What you have said made me curious about…
* How would a manager regard this?
* If you looked at this from a ‘ clients safety’ perspective what thoughts would you have?
* What are the differences in beliefs/understandings/approaches between…?
* What do you think would need to happen?
* What would happen if you tried…?
* Where do you think things will be in…(time)?
* What will happen if nothing changes?

**The experiential learning cycle – David Kolb**

Kolb’s experiential learning cycle provides a useful framework for supervisory discussions. The learning cycle consists of four stages; Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualisation and Active Experimentation. The diagram below provides an explanation for each stage and demonstrates how they fit together in a cycle;

A picture containing text, businesscard, screenshot

Description automatically generated

Effective supervision provides an opportunity for the practitioner to explore all four areas of the Kolb cycle, reflecting and making sense of an experience to develop meaningful and purposeful actions. Individuals may have a preference for a particular part of the cycle (e.g. some may prefer to move straight from the experience to action) and it is the role of the supervisor to support the practitioner to explore all areas of the cycle. Discussions should be informed by the use of theories, research and values.

**Kolb – Style Questions for Supervision**

**Focus on Experience**

Here the emphasis is on facilitating an accurate and detailed recall of events. A partial description of the situation will undermine the rest of the cycle. We can be assisted to recall more than we think if the right questions are asked.

* How are you today- what’s your day been like so far?
* What happened before the visit/meeting?
* What was your role?
* What was your aim? What planning did you do?
* What did you expect to happen?
* What happened?
* What did you say and do? What methods or interventions did you try?
* What did the baby and/or client say or show?
* What reactions did you notice to what you said/did?
* What surprised or puzzled you?
* What struck you? What were the key moments?
* What words, nonverbal communications, smells, sounds, images struck you?
* What did you notice about yourself/ the users/ other workers?
* What didn’t you notice? What was hard to observe?
* What observations or concerns do other agencies have?
* What went according to plan? What didn’t happen?
* What changes or choices did you make?
* What did you say, notice or do immediately after the session/appointment?

**Kolb – Style Questions for Supervision**

**Focus on Reflection**

Here the emphasis is on eliciting feelings, partly because they bring out further information, or may reveal underlying attitudes. They may also give clues to other personal factors complicating/blocking the workers experience. Reflection helps the worker make links between the current situation and his/her prior experiences, skills, and knowledge.

* What did you feel at the start of this visit? What feelings did you bring into the visit?
* Describe the range of feelings you had in this visit?
* What did the visit/your feelings remind you of?
* What previous work, processes, skills, knowledge are relevant?
* What patterns did you see in the visit? Are these familiar?
* Where have you encountered similar processes?
* Describe a time when you last experienced that – what happened?
* Who/What does the client remind you of?
* What did you think the client was thinking? Based on your evidence?
* What feelings might you or other workers be carrying on behalf of the client? For example, what transference of projection might have been occurring?
* What other factors might influence how you, the client, co-worker felt or reacted? For example, race, age, gender, sexuality?
* Where or when did you feel most or least comfortable?
* Who seemed least or most comfortable – at what points?
* What thoughts went through your mind during the session?
* What ideas came to you during the session?
* What did you tell yourself about what was happening, or about your feelings?
* What feelings were you left with – does this always happen after seeing these kinds of cases?
* What metaphor or analogy would you describe your experiences of working with this situation?
* What was left unfinished?

Other methods to assist reflection include role play, genogram, eco maps to draw out context, roles and patterns.

**Kolb – Style Questions for Supervision**

**Focus on Analysis**

Here the emphasis is on analysis, probing the meanings that the supervisee and the user attribute to the situation, consideration of other explanations, the identification of what is known or understood, and the areas for further assessment.

* List three assumptions you brought into this visit.
* How do you explain or understand what happened in the visit?
* How did this visit fit/or not fit into the overall aims of your work with this client?
* What aims/outcomes were/were not achieved?
* What went well, or not well and why?
* What other, possibly unexpected outcomes, did the visit produce?
* How else could you explain what was happening in that visit?
* How far did this visit confirm or challenge your previous understanding or hypothesis?
* What new information emerged? What was the critical moment?
* What theory, training, research, policy, values might help you make sense of what happened in this session?
* How else might you have managed the visit?
* What are the current needs, risks, strengths for the user/s?
* What is unknown?
* What conclusions are you drawing from this work so far?
* How would you define your role in this situation?
* How would other key agencies define your role?
* How would the client define your role?
* What expectations does your agency have of your role?
* What family or community behaviours are acceptable to you?

Other activities that may assist analysis include; sharing articles, references, case presentations, external speakers, attending training, group supervision.

**Kolb – Style Questions for Supervision**

**Focus on Action Plans**

The focus here is on translating the analysis into planning, preparation, and action. This includes the identification of outcomes and success criteria as well as consideration of potential complications and contingency plans.

* In light of the reflection and analysis we have done, what is your overall summary of where things are at, and what needs to be done next?
* Can you identify what you are not and what you are responsible for in managing this case?
* What training, supervisory, co-work and support needs have been raised for you?
* What information needs to be obtained before proceeding?
* What are your aims in the next phase of the work?
* What is urgent and essential?
* What would be desirable?
* What is negotiable and non-negotiable in this situation?
* What would be a successful outcome to the next session from your perspective/service users/other agencies?
* What might be your strategy for the next session?
* What are the possible best or worse responses from the client?
* How can the client be engaged- what does s/he need from you?
* What contingency plans do you need – what is the bottom line?
* Who else needs to be involved?
* What would you like from them?
* How well equipped do you feel to undertake this?
* Where do you feel more or less confident?
* How can you prepare for this – mental rehearsal, flip charts, reading, co-worker discussion?
* What can I do that will be helpful at this stage?
* When does feedback and debrief need to take place?
* Are there any safety issues for you/others?
* What can we do to minimise the dangers/risk?

Other activities to support the translation of analysis into action may include role play, co-work planning, case planning and liaison with other agencies involved.

1. **Tools and resources to assist with Supervision**

Kirklees Council employees can access Strengthening Practice tools to support reflective discussion [here](https://intranet.kirklees.gov.uk/Policies-and-procedures/Service/Children-s-services-procedures/Strengthening-practice.aspx).

Research in Practice, in partnership with a number of other organisations, developed a Practice Supervisor Development Programme. The resources and tools developed as part of this programme are open access and can be found [here](https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/supervisors-home/). While these resources were initially developed for practice supervisors of Social Workers they can be used by a variety of different professionals to support the supervisory experience. All of the tools are accompanied by guidance to support their use.