

Social Work Supervision

How often should I be having supervision?

Do I need a supervision contract?

What do I do if my supervisor is away for a long period of time?

Introduction

Supervision is central to the practice of social work. It is a professional, relational process between supervisor and supervisee which enables reflective critical analysis and underpins quality social work services. Supervision should be a safe and supportive place to raise complex ethical issues, complaints from clients, personal and professional boundary concerns, and other sensitive matters.

This guidance note provides advice about maintaining professional standards of integrity and conduct, in relation to social work supervision.

Notifications

Sometimes issues relating to supervision can emerge during the investigation of notifications received by the Social Workers Registration Board (SWRB). A supervisor may be asked to provide assurance to the Board that the social worker's practice is robust and ethical. It is harder for the supervisor to provide that assurance when there has been inadequate or infrequent supervision, or when difficult or complex practice issues have not been discussed. When the supervisor has clear sight of the issues raised by a supervisee, they can offer a very helpful endorsement if a social worker is the subject of a complaint or notification.

Notifications by supervisors

If supervisors have concerns about a supervisee's competence, there is a two-step process:

1. The first step is to help the social worker to improve their competence.
2. If the supervisor is still concerned after working with the social worker on their competence, then these concerns must be reported to the SWRB.

Role of supervision following a notification

The complaints and notifications process may result in the SWRB placing conditions on a social worker. This could include a requirement to have more frequent supervision. The Board may also ask a supervisor to report on how competence standards have been addressed during supervision and help their supervisee set goals for Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

The SWRB Code of Conduct

The Code sets out the professional standards of integrity and conduct that apply to all social workers. The following principles are relevant to supervision:

Principle 2: Respect the status of Māori as tangata whenua.

- Undertake supervision in a way that is culturally relevant if the supervisee is Māori, culturally relevant, safe and responsive to Māori clients.
- Ensure that supervision is culturally relevant, safe and responsive to Māori clients.

Supervision should promote inclusive practice underpinned by Te Tiriti o Waitangi and a responsiveness to Māori. This is set out in the SWRB Supervision Expectations for Social Workers.

Principle 4: Be competent and responsible for your professional development.

- Maintain and improve your knowledge and skills.
- Know and work within the limits of your own practice – seek supervision and guidance where necessary.
- Actively participate in supervision and critically reflect on practice.
- Be responsible for and engage in, continuing professional development.

Supervision is a fundamental part of being a competent social worker. It enables you to reflect on your current practice, offers opportunities for learning and development and helps you apply social work ethics, including Te Ao Māori values. Supervision also provides a context for ongoing clarification of values, and the exploration of ethical dilemmas and cultural issues. It offers an opportunity to seek help if your performance, practice or judgement is affected by emotional, mental and physical health concerns.

Both the SWRB and ANZASW have policies about supervision. The SWRB expects you to have regular and appropriate supervision that occurs at least monthly. You are expected to actively participate, be responsible for bringing issues to supervision, and be open and honest with your supervisor. Failure to undertake supervision is a breach of the SWRB Code of Conduct.

If supervision is not available to you for a period, such as your supervisor being away, then talk to your manager about alternative supervision opportunities, so you can meet your professional responsibilities. When you renew your Practising Certificate, you are required to declare that you are receiving regular supervision. The SWRB may also ask social workers to provide evidence of supervision and a contract for supervision if they are undertaking a competence assessment.

Principle 10: Keep accurate records and use technology effectively and safely. Keep clear and accurate records, including for supervision.

Recording supervision should be a partnership between the supervisee and supervisor, with both parties maintaining copies of the record. Records should include the date of the meeting, the agenda, decisions made and agreed actions. They should also record any areas of disagreement between the supervisor and supervisee.

Reflections

Supervisors and supervisees may like to reflect on the following questions together:

Is our supervision supporting accountability to those we are working with and the social work profession?

Is our supervision regular, uninterrupted and based on a negotiated contract?

Do we discuss professional obligations such as record keeping and Continuing Professional Development?

Are we maintaining a safe space for raising complex ethical issues, complaints from clients, personal and professional boundary concerns, and other sensitive matters?

How are we maintaining and developing competence across the SWRB's Core Competence Standards?

Summary

The contracted supervision relationship between a social worker and their supervisor is fundamental to ensuring safe and competent practice. It also supports the well-being and professional development of the practitioner. As a social worker, you are expected to have regular and appropriate supervision.

Related advice

Social Workers Registration Board Ngā Ture Whanonga/ Code of Conduct - <https://swrb.govt.nz/practice/code-of-conduct/>

SWRB Supervision Expectations for Social Workers - <https://swrb.govt.nz/about-us/policies/>

ANZASW Supervision Policy 2016 - <https://www.anzasw.nz/find-a-publication/archive/>

ANZASW Supervision Contract Template - <https://www.anzasw.nz/index.cfm/find-a/resource/>

Oranga Tamariki Practice Centre Guidance on Supervision - <https://practice.orangatamariki.govt.nz/policy/professional-supervision/>



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