



The Professional Matrix

Social Work Supervision

❖ What is Social Work Supervision? ❖

As stated in Minnesota Statutes, Section 148D.010, subdivision 16:

“Supervision’ means a professional relationship between a supervisor and a social worker in which the supervisor provides evaluation and direction of the services provided by the social worker to promote competent and ethical services to clients through the continuing development of the social worker's knowledge and application of accepted professional social work knowledge skills and values”

Supervision is required in Minnesota. All MN Social Workers are required to receive supervision in the first 4,000 hours of practice (minimum of two years of full time employment).¹

Supervision from an Agency's Perspective ²

1. Supervision is a tool that is used to achieve the agency's objectives.
2. Supervision will be affected by the agency's goals, structure, policies and procedures, service settings, and the agency's climate.
3. The supervisor serves as the mediator and liaison between the agency and the supervisee.
4. Authority and power are granted to the supervisor by the agency making these issues major components of the supervisory relationship.

❖ Potential Uses for Supervision ❖

Supervision is an opportunity for consultation on current practice and debriefing on past practice.

Supervision enhances knowledge and skills through the practice of skills, discussion of pertinent research, feedback on job performance, and development of greater self-awareness.

Valuable time is spent on reviewing decisions and judgments, considering alternative options, recognizing subjective elements, and learning from experiences.

The supervisee's objectives, performance and motivation can be monitored and improved.

Professional ethics are reviewed, practiced, and internalized into daily practice.

Supervision provides constructive feedback on past and current performance and assists in setting performance related goals.

Supervision assists with advocacy abilities and contribution to the interdisciplinary team objectives and approaches.

**Supporting social workers with quality supervision
is an *investment*, not an *expense*.**



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❖ Providing Supervision Is Good Ethical Practice ❖

Supervision is necessary for safe, sustainable, and ethical practice and is an integral part of the employer's duty of care.

The nature of professional supervision reflects distinctive characteristics of social work including:

1. Working to affect positive change in complex individual and family situations,
2. Issues relating to safety and a duty to warn others,
3. Protection of children and vulnerable adults,
4. Assessment and management of risk and uncertainty, and
5. Improvement of professional judgment in conditions of chronic conflict and stress.

Supervision assists with identifying challenges in the earliest stages, as well as preparation for possible risks.

Supervisors assist with identifying education, capacity-building opportunities, training, and development needs and options in order to increase social workers' effectiveness.

Frequent supervision is very important for new social workers. It can be difficult for employers to consistently provide the guidance these social workers need.³

Supervision ensures that support is adequate to prevent work-related harm to social workers' health and well-being.

In an environment of increasing demands (longer waitlists, larger caseloads, and more demands for accountability), supervision provides support to help the social worker handle stress by providing encouragement, reassurance, and appropriate autonomy.

❖ Supervision Benefits Employees ❖

Employees have "space" away from their work in a private one-to-one supportive setting. Discussion is less guarded due to the safe relationship of learning without possible performance consequences.

Social work can be a high-risk area of practice, as well as have high staff burn out. Quality supervision decreases these factors, benefiting the employee as well as the employer.

Employees receive feedback about their work, which encourages high work performance and a positive environment.

Agency-provided supervision increases the feeling of being valued by the agency. A supportive relationship is developed with both the supervisor and employer thereby increasing job satisfaction.

Work successes can be acknowledged on a regular basis.



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❖ Supervision Benefits Employers ❖

In supervision, a beneficial relationship is developed with the employee that offers an objective professional perspective resulting in improvements in work performance.

Since social work often relies on individual judgment, supervision with an experienced professional builds independence and competence within the workplace.

Communication may be improved between the employee and employer.

Employees provided with quality supervision are more organized and efficient which increases work productivity.

The employer is able to focus to the individual worker's administrative and professional needs.

The social worker and supervisor can regularly review agency mission, objectives, and priorities.

Research consistently supports the correlation between employer-provided supervision and increased staff retention.^{4, 5}

Being supported through quality supervision can result in workplace contentment and commitment.

Effective supervision produces motivated, confident employees who can be mentors and better peers to others in the organization.

Absent or poor quality supervision within organizations has been linked to the observation that new social workers lack often confidence in their knowledge and skill development and that they struggle to formulate ideas about client development as well as the change process.⁶

Leadership can be exercised naturally, clarifying and affirming the vision of quality service delivery, through professional supervision.

Supervision can be designed to promote the mission of the organization.

❖ Supervision Benefits Service Users ❖

Those who utilize the agency's services will receive effective service, superior advocacy, and quality ethical care.

Quality supervision ensures efficient, effective delivery of services.

Supervision decreases complaints and concerns about the service and general performance through the identification of an employee's training and development needs.

Effective supervision results in increased staff retention which ensures continuity of care for clients.



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❖ References ❖

¹ Minnesota Board of Social Work

² NASW. Clinical Social Work Practice Update. June, 2003, Volume 3, Number 2.

³ Tsui, M. (2005). *Social Work Supervision: Contexts and Concepts*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.

⁴ Ellett, A. & Millar, K. (2001, January). A multi-state study of professional organizational culture: Implications for employee retention and child welfare practice. Paper presented at Society for Social Work Research 5th Annual Conference, Atlanta, GA.

⁵ Cicero-Reese, B. & Black, P. (1998). Research suggests why child welfare workers stay of the field supervisor-student relationship. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 11(1), 121-135.

⁶ Rothstein, J. (2001). Clinical supervision – then and now: The professional development of social workers. Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping, 7(1), 61-71.

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