

Standards for Supervision in Child Welfare



*Published by
the Colorado
Department of
Human Services
in conjunction with
the National
Child Welfare
Resource Center
for Management
and Administration*

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About this Booklet

This booklet is the product of a work group of state and county social services staff of the Colorado Department of Social Services. Led by Susan Klein-Rothschild, the work group, whose names appear on the opposite page, was assisted by consultant Marsha Salus. As a former child welfare supervisor herself, a trainer for supervisors and a nationally-recognized curriculum developer, Ms. Salus' good humor and guidance greatly enhanced the quality of the product. The joint venture began with a recognition of the importance of supervision in the practice of child welfare and culminated in the definition of roles and expectations that comprise excellent supervision.

Thanks to the reviewers of this document including Jake Terpstra of the U. S. Children's Bureau and Helaine Hornby of the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Management and Administration.

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Introduction

Supervisors play a key role in the provision of child welfare services. They are responsible for assuring that effective and efficient child welfare services are provided to children and families. Effective supervisors orchestrate the work of the unit to make it consistent with the mission and goals of the agency. Strong supervision supports positive caseworker/client relationships, comprehensive child and family assessment, treatment plans which build on the client's strengths and meet their needs, and a case flow that results in better outcomes for families. Many of us identify outstanding supervision as a key factor in our own job satisfaction and sense of accomplishment. There is no substitute for quality supervisory practice.

Historically, our system of child welfare has promoted strong, competent casework staff into supervisory positions with little structure, direction, or training regarding how to be most effective in the new management role. However, the skills that make a good caseworker are not always consistent with the skills that make a good supervisor. The intent of developing standards for supervisors is to provide clear expectations, structure, and guidance for the art of supervision.

To develop standards, our group of state and county social service staff began with a review of the literature on supervision in child welfare. There was limited relevant information specifically focused on standards of practice. We found that the classic, *Supervision in Social Work*, by Alfred Kadushin, provided a framework for the categories of supervision which

were helpful. The three categories are: administrative, educational, and supportive. The expectations under each of these categories are not mutually exclusive. However, we found the distinction helpful for the purposes of clarifying what is involved in quality supervision.

Two elements cut across all categories of supervision that merit special attention: *modeling* and *cultural responsiveness*. Modeling of effective communication and behavior consistent with standards and expectations by the supervisor can be a most effective tool in positively influencing the performance of staff. Issues related to cultural responsiveness include personnel decisions and actions, communication strategies, techniques of intervention with families, and working relationships among staff. These two components are included in expectations of each of three supervisory categories.

In trying to implement these standards, agencies must keep some important caveats in mind. The standards must be viewed with consideration of the supervisor/staff ratio (such as one supervisor per 5 to 7 staff), availability of resources in any community, administrative support, and training. Supervisors work in a larger context than their own work unit. They must be provided the support and resources to perform their jobs successfully.

In developing these standards, the goal is to refine the expectations of supervisory practice for child welfare services and to provide training, hiring, and performance evaluation based on the standards. With clear standards and a strong knowledge base, there is an increased ability to give more authority and support to supervisors for all aspects of their work including decision making, problem solving, and program development.

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Administrative Supervision

The activities of the supervisor which are directed toward implementing the organizational objectives and helping to ensure that the quantity and quality of work achieves standards articulated or assumed for the agency.

The administrative function involves planning, executing, monitoring, and evaluating activities to accomplish the work of the agency through the staff.

Foster ownership of agency vision, mission, goals, values, policies and procedures.

The agency vision and mission provide the foundation and the direction for all work accomplished by the agency. The work of the unit must be coordinated with the mission, goals, and values.

Expectations:

- Communicate/inform staff of the agency mission and goals.
- Model behaviors that are consistent with the agency mission, goals, values, and a professional code of ethics.
- Establish objectives and priorities with the unit that reflect agency goals.
- Explain the rationale supporting policies and procedures.
- Articulate the connection between the policies and procedures and the agency's mission and goals.
- Articulate the linkage between workers' daily task and the agency mission and goals.
- Support staff in their efforts to carry out the agency mission and goals.

Assure cohesion and high performance of the work unit.

Each unit is responsible for achieving program goals for children and families. High productivity in the unit is based on a structure that provides support, consistent direction, recognition and connections for staff who each have independent functions.

Expectations:

- Identify and analyze the critical functions of the unit.
- Develop a system for successful achievement of these critical functions.
- Develop and implement a system for assigning work that facilitates the goals and objectives of the unit.
- Select key indicators to determine if unit goals are being met.
- Develop and implement methods of assessing and tracking unit performance.
- Maintain the documentation necessary for program compliance.
- Summarize and evaluate the data to identify problems and trends for unit planning.
- Modify plans and methods to adjust to crisis and changes such as caseloads, staffing, and new requirements.
- Convene meetings of the unit at least twice a month.
- Communicate information in a culturally responsive manner.

Encourage maximum performance of individual staff.

Increased staff performance results in better services to families. It also creates a greater sense of achievement and satisfaction by the workers. It therefore helps to increase staff motivation to perform.

Expectations:

- Establish and maintain conferences with new staff (in agency under 6 months) at least weekly and with experienced staff at least every other week.
- Set and clearly communicate expectations for staff performance related to client outcomes and program compliance.
- Evaluate and monitor the quality, quantity, and timeliness of staff performance.
- Provide frequent, timely, and specific positive feedback and constructive criticism to keep workers apprised of performance.
- Be available to staff for consultation as needed.
- Provide a written performance plan and evaluation of staff a minimum of once per year.
- Take appropriate positive or corrective personnel actions.
- Document worker performance related to program compliance.
- Identify workers' strengths and help them develop those strengths.

Facilitate open communication between staff and upper management to achieve agency and unit goals.

The timely flow of information, changes, plans, and concerns between staff and upper management increases ownership and commitment to the achievement of goals. Communication upward is less frequent and more difficult than downward communication but is equally important.

Expectations:

- Demonstrate state of the art occupational knowledge and provide staff with the information necessary to carry out the job.
- Keep staff informed of changes, trends, plans, and proposals in a timely manner.
- Solicit problems, concerns, issues, and recommendations from staff regarding programmatic needs and systemic issues.
- Communicate recommendations (either from staff or from your own evaluation) to upper level management.
- Present information to staff and administration in a manner that promotes understanding, implementation and/or resolution.
- Communicate information in a culturally responsive manner.

Foster collaborative relationships within the agency and with community agencies.

Positive outcomes are more likely when others in the agency and community understand the program goals, objectives and parameters, and feel heard, understood, and respected.

Expectations:

- Participate in the development of a system for communication across units and agencies.
- Provide staff with feedback regarding the messages they are communicating about the unit and the agency.
- Assure consistent visibility of unit/agency in community.
- Educate the community and other units in agency regarding unit goals, objectives and parameters.
- Develop and maintain positive relationships with the community.
- Help staff to understand roles and parameters of other units within the agency and community agencies.
- Model cultural responsiveness in collaborative relationships.

Educational Supervision

The activities of the supervisor which are directed toward helping staff learn what they need to know to carry out their jobs. This includes: helping new workers to understand the job and develop beginning competence; maintaining an ongoing emphasis on developing staff competence to complete the critical casework functions; and assisting senior level workers in their career planning.

Provide/assure orientation for new staff.

Orientation provides information about the employee's role in the agency and the agency's role in the community. This helps to reduce the anxiety new staff experience, creates a sense of belonging to the agency, and promotes the development of staff competence.

Expectations:

- Assess the knowledge, skills, and learning style of new staff.
- Develop a system for orientation of new staff that builds on existing resources in the community and in the agency and accommodates the learning style of the new staff.
- Assure that orientation includes: agency structure, culture and values; knowledge of the community; legal mandates; job responsibilities; various programs provided by the agency; policies and procedures; and client population and cultural sensitivity.
- Assure that orientation for new staff occurs within 90 days of employment.

Create and implement a training and/or development plan with each staff member.

Supervisors play an essential role in the development of staff. The joint development of a clear, specific, and realistic plan promotes its achievement.

Expectations:

- Conduct initial and on-going assessments with staff to identify their strengths and needs.
- Examine alternatives with staff to meet their developmental and training needs.
- Develop an individualized performance plan with staff to meet their needs.
- Conduct periodic reviews of the plan with staff and make adjustments as appropriate.
- Provide/assure ongoing training regarding agency, policy and procedures, and casework practice.

Encourage personal and professional growth and advancement.

Personal and professional growth helps staff achieve a sense of accomplishment and esteem which positively affects performance.

Expectations:

- Assist staff in finding educational opportunities.
- Assess, with staff, their personal and professional goals.
- Support/encourage staff to achieve their goals.
- Encourage development of specialized expertise (as related to the job and the needs of the work unit).
- Encourage staff creativity and innovation in new projects and roles.
- Model/mentor continued growth and development for staff.
- Promote independence and autonomy in casework practice.
- Whenever feasible, encourage staff to serve on relevant committees to provide job satisfaction beyond routine duties and to broaden their perspective.

Provide case supervision and consultation.

The supervisor plays a critical role in achieving positive outcomes for children and families by lending and encouraging objectivity and promoting consistency and quality casework practice.

Expectations:

- Consider workers' skills, strengths, interests, areas of needed development and the client's needs in assigning cases.
- Discuss the worker's entire caseload with her or him at least monthly.
- Review 25 percent of each worker's case records quarterly.
- Assist staff in case assessment including identifying present-ing problems, the dynamics underlying the problems, the strategies for intervention and development of the plan.
- Help staff identify problematic areas in work with the client and the anticipated course of intervention.
- Help staff identify community resources and how to access them as needed.
- Increase staff awareness of how their own attitudes and approaches, life experience and cultural background poten-tially impact the relationship with the client and the outcome of intervention.
- Facilitate staff self awareness as a diagnostic tool in plan-ning and intervention.
- Assist staff in assessing progress towards case goals.
- Support staff in making critical case decisions regarding placement, reunification of children, termination of paren-tal rights, and case closure.
- Encourage staff to identify the cultural diversity of all families and help staff develop plans to address individual differences.

Supportive ~~Supervision~~

The activities of the supervisor which are directed toward creating a psychological and physical climate that enables staff to feel positive about the job. These activities may be showing concern and empathy toward individuals to keep them satisfied, comfortable, and positive so clients may be better served.

Establish a positive work climate in the unit.

Staff work more effectively in a nurturing environment where they are valued, and there is an encouragement of individuality, risk-taking, and personal and professional development. Staff are more likely to improve their performance if the organization is sensitive to their personal needs. The “climate” that each staff member experiences is determined primarily by the way first line supervision is conducted.

Expectations:

- Acknowledge effective performance, caseworker efforts, client progress, accomplishment, and individual contributions.
- Treat staff with importance, dignity, and respect.
- Create/model high standards of practice.
- Be sensitive to the needs and feelings of staff.
- Support staff in taking care of themselves physically and emotionally.
- Treat staff as professionals.
- Support a climate of trust and openness.
- Encourage staff to express their feelings and concerns about individual clients as well as the agency and help them to resolve these feelings.
- Create a sense of safety and stability to support risk-taking.
- Create an environment in which cultural differences are appreciated.
- Refer staff to outside assistance (e.g., employee assistance program), when appropriate.
- Use mistakes as an opportunity to teach and learn.

Develop/support a team work approach.

The results of a team are greater than the sum of its parts. Shared decision making frequently provides better outcomes and decreases individual liability.

Expectations:

- Involve staff in unit decision making.
- Encourage peer consultation, collaboration, and shared decision making on cases.
- Foster cooperative relationships in the unit.
- Promote a unique identity for the unit.
- Assess team strengths and needs.
- Capitalize on individual expertise for the purposes of enhancing the functioning of the team.
- Define team roles and create norms for how members will work together.
- Support staff in their quests to obtain positions of greater responsibility and to make other needed transitions.

Facilitate successful resolution of conflict within and outside the agency.

Conflict is inherent in supervision and can be a healthy aspect of life. Successful resolution of conflict creates opportunities for growth on an individual, team, and agency level. Unresolved conflict is detrimental to the functioning of the individual, team and agency as a whole.

Expectations:

- Create a safe and accepting environment which encourages staff to raise issues and concerns.
- Acknowledge the normative and positive value of conflict.
- Demonstrate respect for differences of opinion.
- Facilitate discussions that create a solution which meets the needs of those involved in the conflict.
- Intervene in interpersonal conflict when the lack of resolution effects the unit, client, or relationships in the agency.
- Assist staff in depersonalizing conflict.

Develop self-awareness of one's own attitudes, needs and behavior and its effect on the supervisor-worker relationship.

Supervision is a dynamic process where one's own needs and issues impact supervisory relationships and effectiveness.

Expectations:

- Increase awareness of how one's personality and work style affect their staff.
- Increase awareness of how one's life experiences and cultural background can impact on the supervisor/worker relationship.
- Use self awareness as a diagnostic tool/intervention in supervising staff.
- Seek supervision and consultation to enhance one's own effectiveness.
- Develop a system for receiving feedback from staff on supervisory practice.
- Take care of personal physical and emotional needs.
- Exhibit flexibility and accept change in a positive manner.
- Make an effort to improve job skills as needed to accomplish assignments.
- Perform with stability even when under pressure and during emergency situations.
- Recognize and learn from one's own mistakes.

