

Engaging in the supervision cycle: Part 1 - Using open questions

In the following pages, four sets of open-style questions are presented, based on the four parts of the supervision cycle. The questions can be used and adapted for both individual and group settings. Although they are presented here in the cycle's sequence, the supervision process is a dynamic one, continuously moving around different parts of the cycle. Therefore, supervisors will select questions according to what is appropriate at any particular point. Although many of these questions are frequently used, it is useful to consider which part of the cycle they target. Few supervisors are equally confident around all four parts of the cycle. In addition, you may notice that where one worker is comfortable with certain questions, another worker will become defensive.

1 Focusing 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. Workers can be assisted to recall more than they think they can recall if the right questions are asked. In these lists, the 'you' is the supervisee.

- *How are you today - what's your day been like so far?*
- *What happened before the incident?*
- *What was your role?*
- *What was your aim? What planning did you do?*
- *What did you expect to happen?*
- *What exactly happened? Identify different perceptions of co-workers.*
- *What did you say and do? What methods or interventions did you try?*
- *What did the child or young person say, do or show?*
- *What reactions did you notice to what you said/did?*
- *What surprised or puzzled you? Who behaved differently?*
- *What stuck out for you? What were the key moments?*
- *What words, non-verbals, smells, sounds, images struck you?*
- *What did you notice about yourself, the user, your co-worker?*
- *What do you think others would have noticed about you?*
- *What didn't you notice? What or who was hard to observe?*
- *What observations or concerns do other people have?*

- What went according to plan? What didn't happen?

2 Focusing on reflection

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

- What did you feel at the start of the shift? What feelings did you bring into the shift?
- Describe the range of feelings you had during the incident or shift?.
- What did your feelings remind you of?
- What previous work, processes, skills, knowledge are relevant?
- What patterns did you see in the interaction? Are these familiar?
- Where have you encountered similar processes?
- Describe a time when you last experienced that - what happened?
- Who/what does this child/parent remind you of?
- What did you think the other person was feeling - based on what?
- What feelings might you or your co-workers be carrying on behalf of the child/carer/other workers - eg what transference or projection might be occurring?
- What other factors might influence how you, the child or co-worker felt or reacted, eg gender, race?
- Where and 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 are the continuities or discontinuities between this shift and previous work with the child or young person?
- What did you tell yourself about what was happening, or about your feelings?
- What feelings were you left with? Does this always happen after working with these kind of children/circumstances?

3 Focusing on analysis

Here the emphasis is on analysis, probing the meanings that the worker and the young person attributes to the situation, consideration of other explanations, the identification of what is not known or understood, and areas for further assessment.

- List three assumptions each that you, co-worker or user brought with you into the work with that young person / approach to managing the incident with that young person?.
- How would you explain or understand what happened? **Note:** it is important to identify and probe different perceptions.
- How would your approach have been different if: the child or other person had been black; you had been a male or female worker; you had been working with another member of staff?
- How did this session fit or not fit into the overall aims of the child's care plan?

Note: This relates to issues of programme and treatment integrity.

- What aims/outcomes for this session/shift were or were not achieved?
- What went well, or not well, and why?
- What other, possibly unexpected outcomes, did the session produce?
- How else could you explain what happened?
- How would the child or young person explain what was happening in that session?
- What was the nature of the power relations during this session?
- Did power relations shift during the session - if so, why? What might this tell you about assumptions around gender, race, sexuality etc?
- How far did this session confirm or challenge your previous understanding or hypothesis?
- What new information emerged? What was the critical moment?
- What bits of theory, training, research, policy, values might help you make sense of what was happening in this session?
- How else might you have managed the session?
- What are the current strengths, needs, risks for the different users?
- What is not known?
- What conclusion are you drawing from this work so far?

Note: Role perception influences analysis.

- *How do you define your role in this situation?*
- *How does 'X' agency define your role in this situation?*
- *How do child and their family define your role?*
- *What expectations do agencies have of your role?*

Note: Values influence analysis

- *What family or community behaviours are acceptable to you?*
- *What behaviours or norms are acceptable to the child, their family or community?*
- *What behaviours are acceptable to this or other agencies - why?*

4 Focusing on action plans

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

- *In the light of the reflection and analysis we've done, what's your overall summary of where things are at, and what needs to be done next?*
- *Can you identify what you are and are not responsible for in managing this situation?*
- *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 this next phase of work?*
- *What is urgent and essential?*
- *What would be desirable?*
- *What is negotiable and what is non-negotiable in this situation?*
- *What would be a successful outcome to the next session from your perspective?*
- *What would be a successful outcome to the next session from the child's perspective?*
- *What are the different ways in which you could approach this?*
- *What are the possible best or worst responses from the user?*
- *How can the child 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 (co-worker, supervisor, other agency)?
- 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, flipchart map, reading, co-worker?
- What can I do as supervisor that would be helpful at this stage?
- What similar tasks have you done?
- What and when does feedback and debriefing need to take place?
- Are there any safety issues for you or others?
- What can be done to minimise any dangers?

Try to identify what style of questioning is most familiar in terms of your own practice as a supervisor – refer to Part 2 of this handout

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