ISSUE BRIEF

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONS

casey family programs

What are some considerations for
designing effective supervisory training?

Background

Supervisors help retain high quality staff and ensure high quality casework that keeps children safe and strengthens families. **Effective supervision contributes directly to caseworker effectiveness, including decision-making, engagement with families, and goal-setting and attainment.** Absent high quality supervision, staff leave and children suffer, either by experiencing more abuse and neglect, or lingering in foster care.[1]

Supervisors also play an important role in system reform efforts, implementation of evidence-based practices, and communication of agency policies and practice models to staff, families, and the community. They are key informants to their managers and administrators about areas of challenge and opportunities for agency improvement. Not only are supervisors accountable for day-to-day administrative, educational, and clinical supervision, but they are also **key to building positive organizational culture and making sure that staff feel engaged, respected, and supported to tackle the challenges of the job.**[2]

Most new supervisors don't move into their positions with full command of the complex mix of knowledge, skills, and abilities required to be effective; a robust menu of training opportunities is necessary to build foundational supervisory

competence and advance the professional development of supervisors over time.[3] **Classroom training alone is not sufficient: a single training or series will not provide supervisors with everything they need to be skilled and effective.** Additional job aids and supports — such as checklists, practice handbooks, peer learning networks, micro-learnings, mentoring, and coaching — are needed to reinforce and advance what is learned during training and to promote a culture of learning throughout the agency. Agencies can reaffirm their commitment to supervisors bolstered by other professional development opportunities and support.

Supervisory training approaches

Similar to training for staff, training for child welfare supervisors can be divided into two main categories: **core training for new supervisors and ongoing training for continuing professional development.** Core training provides new supervisors with an orientation to their role, including information about agency context, policies and procedures, administrative tasks, and basic supervisory skills. Ongoing training frequently focuses on building leadership competencies, supporting caseworkers' implementation of new evidence-based practices, and various forms of coaching related to advanced clinical topics and agency priority areas. As with all training, supervisor training should be competency-based[4] and include a variety of instructional designs beyond the in-person, traditional classroom model.

Core supervisory training

Core training is provided to new supervisors, generally within the first year of their promotion or hire, but ideally prior to assuming the supervisory role. The goal of core supervisory training is to provide new supervisors with an in-depth understanding of their role as well as enhance their competencies in educational and clinical supervision.

Jurisdictional example: California

Through a statewide collaborative, the California Social Work Education Center (CalSWEC) provides in-service training and continuing professional education to public child welfare staff in the state of California. CalSWEC has created the **California Common Core for Supervisors**,[5] which consists of six topic areas: (1) Casework supervision, (2) Child welfare policy and practice, (3) Evidence-based practice, (4) Fiscal essentials, (5) Educational supervision, and (6) Managing for results. New supervisors are required to complete all six modules within the first year of hire or promotion. The curriculum was developed as part of a multiyear statewide collaborative effort that also included the creation of a common core for caseworkers. The content in the two training series creates a parallel process for both caseworkers and supervisors so that staff at all levels are operating from the same model and speaking the same language.

What are some considerations for designing effective supervisory training?

Every training module includes a set of competencies and objectives, a transfer of learning component, and an embedded evaluation. The following table provides an overview of the topics covered:

TRAINING MODULE	TOPICS COVERED
Casework supervision	• Role of supervision • Themes in case conferencing • Professional practice issues • Group and individual case conferences
Child welfare policy and practice for supervisors	• Adoption and Safe Families Act • California themes • Accountability • Using data to measure outcomes • Evidence-based practice • Making the transition • Fairness and equity concepts • Culture and stereotypes • Strengths-based practice • Engagement • Teaming
Evidence-based practice	• Definitions • Research vs. practice wisdom • Benefits of evidence-based practice • Evidence supporting cross-cutting practices
Fiscal essentials	• Fiscal foundations • State funding • Application and taking it home
Educational supervision	• 4 roles of supervisor • Foundations and principles of adult learning • Motivational tools for supporting and teaching staff • Transfer of learning: Managers' and supervisors' role • Self-assessment and action planning
Managing for results	• Data-informed practice • Key concepts to understand child welfare outcomes • Using outcome data in child welfare practice • Taking your first steps toward data analysis • Outcome-based management

Ongoing supervisory training

Ongoing professional development opportunities are essential for supervisors to continue their growth as leaders who can solve complex problems, manage organizational change, and translate the policies and practices of their organization to their teams —and the needs of their team back up to their managers and administrators. **Ongoing training for supervisors should cover a variety of topical areas including adaptive leadership, practice model implementation, evidence-based practices, critical thinking, and managing up.**

An organization can demonstrate a commitment to ongoing learning in many different ways, including supporting time for supervisors to explore short training videos (microlearnings), or hosting regular "lunch and learn" sessions where staff are exposed to new practices and information in a relaxed, collaborative environment. Agencies may also consider implementing ChildStat or other quality improvement meetings to foster accountability and shared-decision-making, and help leadership better understand and support what is happening on the front lines.

Coaching, mentoring, and professional education also provide opportunities for building a culture of learning and improving the transfer of skills to the job. Effective supervisory training programs include formal and informal access to supervisory coaches and mentors, regular supervision from managers, professional development plans, and various peer and professional learning opportunities, such as workshops, conferences, and advanced degree programs.[6]

Jurisdictional example: New Jersey

The New Jersey Child Welfare Training Partnership[7] provides ongoing professional development to the state's child welfare workforce. Supervisors in New Jersey have numerous training opportunities available to them through this partnership. One such opportunity is the **Master Supervisor Certificate** that is open to supervisors who have at least two years of supervision experience, have completed the new supervisor training, and have secured the recommendation of their local office manager and casework supervisor. This certificate program is designed to provide supervisors with the opportunity to grow and develop their skills. The following courses must be taken within two years of starting the program (and passed with a grade of 80 percent or higher) to obtain certification:

- Aligning Our Values
- Child Sexual Abuse Issues for Supervisors
- Coaching the Challenging Employee
- Data Skills for Supervisors
- Domestic Violence Training for Supervisors
- First Responders for Supervisors
- Supervising the Transfer of Learning Process
- Supervising Workers on Family Reunification
- Supervisors Building Workers' Resiliency

The courses in the certificate program are also available to supervisors who are interested in their professional development but not working toward a certificate. Additional courses available to supervisors outside of the certificate program include:

- Difficult Conversations: A Survival Guide for Supervisors
- Executive Leadership in Organizations Serving Children and Families
- Executive Writing Skills
- Focus on Supervision
- Introduction to Supervision of Paraprofessional Staff
- Supervising Case Practice in New Jersey
- Supervising Support Staff on Customer Service and Time Management Skills
- Supervisory Practice in Child Welfare Module 1 of 3: Self-Management
- Supervisory Practice in Child Welfare Module 2 of 3: People Management
- Supervisory Practice in Child Welfare Module 3 of 3: Casework Management

National example: National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI)

NCWWI has developed a range of ongoing professional development opportunities and supports for supervisors, including:

- **Leadership Academy for Supervisors:** The LAS is a free web-based leadership training for experienced child welfare supervisors. The core curriculum consists of six online modules, each based on the NCWWI Leadership Model. The LAS provides 21 contact hours of self-directed online learning, with two tracks to enhance learning transfer: a personal learning plan to develop leadership skills and a change initiative project to contribute to a systems change within the agency. Supervisors complete the online LAS on their own time and at their own pace.

- **Leadership and Workforce Development Quickbits and Microlearnings:** These short online training segments (3–7 minutes in length) are designed for busy child welfare supervisors and managers and can be used as enhancements to classroom training programs for supervisors.

Implementation considerations

When implementing a comprehensive training program for supervisors, it is important to ensure that it is competency-based, part of a larger professional development and training program that includes coaching and supports in addition to the traditional classroom or online training modules, and is routinely evaluated for effectiveness:

- **Create a competency-based approach**: A competency-based training program ensures that trainees are learning the knowledge and skills required to perform specific tasks and functions of the job. An organization must identify job competencies for supervisors so that these competencies are adequately represented in the training. Training competencies are specific behavioral statements of awareness, knowledge, or skill that will be achieved by the conclusion of a training event.[8] Competency-based curricula include learning objectives that reflect specific dimensions of a training competency and help guide the training goals and activities.

- **Build a culture of learning and professional development**: When thinking comprehensively about an agency's workforce development system, training is only one component. A wide-ranging program will allow for staff at all levels to learn and grow.[9] Organizations that have a learning culture (as opposed to a punitive culture) have lower staff burnout and promote employee commitment and retention.[10] Supervisor training is most effective when implemented within a learning organization where leaders at all

levels practice and model developing, using, and sharing knowledge to improve the quality of their agency's practices.

• **Incorporate meaningful evaluation**: As with the implementation of any initiative, supervisor training programs need to be evaluated for effectiveness. An ongoing training evaluation, with pre- and post-tests, will ensure that participants are achieving the desired level of knowledge and skills. This evaluation must be based on competencies and will ideally include an assessment not only at the conclusion of training but also six or 12 months after the training event to establish its long-term effectiveness. In addition, the evaluation should address how the training has been applied in the field.

1 Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015). Supervising for Quality Child Welfare Practice. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/effective_supervision.pdf

2 Salus, M. (2004). Supervising Child Protective Services Caseworkers Manual. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Supervision__Perf_Management/supercps.pdf

3 Kanak, S., Baker, M., Herz, L., & Maciolek, S. (2008). Building Effective Training Systems for Child Welfare Agencies. Retrieved from: https://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/TrainingNetwork/BuildingEffectiveTrainingSystems.pdf

4 For more information about competency-based training in child welfare, see Competency-based Workforce Development: A Synthesis of Current Approaches available at http://ncwwi.org/files/Workforce_Development_Process/NCWWI_Competency_Synthesis.pdf

5 The full curriculum is available on CalSWEC's website: http://calswec.berkeley.edu/common-core-supervisors

6 Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2015). Supervising for Quality Child Welfare Practice. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/effective_supervision.pdf

7 More information about the partnership and a full course catalog are available on their website: https://socialwork.rutgers.edu/centers/institute-families/office-child-welfare-initiatives/new-jersey-child-welfare-training-partnership

8 National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2015). Competency-based workforce development: A synthesis of current approaches. Albany, NY. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Workforce_Development_Process/NCWWI_Competency_Synthesis.pdf

9 National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2015). Workforce Development Framework (WDF). Albany, NY University at Albany. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/NCWWI_Workforce_Development_Framework_Overview.pdf

10 Turnell, A., Munro, E., & Murphy, T. (2013). Soft is Hardest: Leading for Learning in Child Protection Services Following a Child Fatality. Child Welfare, 92(2), 199-216.