

The Supervisory Relationship



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Overview

- Part I
 - The influence of individual and developmental differences
 - Processes and issues of the supervisory triad and dyad
- Part II
 - Conflict: When problems arise in the supervisor-supervisee relationship

Questions

- As a supervisor, how will you develop the relationship into one of mutual trust and respect?
- What are some ways you may have displayed resistance as a supervisee? As a supervisor, what can you learn from this and apply to your work with reluctant supervisees?

Personal and Interpersonal Issues in Supervision

- The relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is the foundation for the work that will occur in supervision
- Three essential components
 - Interpersonal structure of the relationship
 - Phases of the relationship
 - The supervisory contract

Phases of the relationship

- Early phase
 - Clarifying the nature of the relationship
 - Developing ways to collaborate effectively
 - Designing a supervision contract
 - Selecting teaching interventions
 - Developing competencies
 - Designing treatment plans

Phases of the relationship

- Mature phase
 - Emphasis is on increasing the individual nature of the relationship
 - Promoting social bonding
 - Behavior becomes less role bound
 - Supervisees develop skills of case conceptualization
 - Increase supervisee's level of confidence

Phases of the relationship

- Termination phase
 - Supervisees understand the linkage between theory and practice more fully
 - Less need for direction from the supervisor
 - Summative evaluation occurs including a discussion of the meaning of termination, feelings, and thoughts
 - Future and developmental goals are discussed

Personal and Interpersonal Issues in Supervision

- Supervisor-supervisee relationship
- Power and authority
- Parallel process
- Personhood

Supervisor-supervisee relationship

- It is the supervisor's responsibility to develop an atmosphere conducive to learning
 - Acceptance of personhood of the supervisee
 - Sense of safety and being cared for
- Can supervision be effective in the absence of a positive and productive supervisor-supervisee relationship?
- Yes, but it may not be as successful

Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship

- **Trust:** the ability to rely on another with a certain sense of predictability
 - Supervisors can: discuss with the supervisee what both can do to create a trusting supervisory relationship
 - Encourage their supervisees to bring up any concerns they have about trust during supervision sessions
- **Self-disclosure:** willingness of the supervisor and supervisee to be open to and discuss all issues that may arise in the supervisory relationship
 - Used as a method for building an emotional bond, working alliance NOT to work on personal issues

Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship

- Transference and countertransference
- In the case of transference (ex: anxiety about “doing well” for the supervisor), supervisor must:
 - Be aware of the phenomenon
 - Assist the supervisee in developing a sense of competence and problem-solving ability NOT directly challenge supervisee about transference issues

Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship

- Countertransference may be categorized in one of four areas
 - General personality characteristics
 - Inner conflicts reactivated by the supervision situation
 - Countertransference reactions to the individual supervisee
 - Countertransference to the supervisees transference
- Common reactions/feelings
 - Help and rescue the supervisee or dislike the supervisee
- Supervisor must
 - Be self-aware
 - Consult with a colleague or consultant NOT the supervisee – it may be too overwhelming *****

Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship

- Diversity issues
 - Cultural experience
 - Gender
 - Cognitive and ego development
 - Professional identity
 - Experience level
 - Theoretical orientation
 - Self-presentation
- If supervisors do not address these factors as they become relevant, this will certainly weaken the trust level on the part of supervisees

Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship

- Appropriate boundaries: extending the boundary beyond supervision can complicate the supervisory relationship
- Supervisors must take full responsibility for:
 - Determining the limits of the relationship
 - Taking action when they believe the boundaries are unclear

Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship

- Power and authority
 - Power: the ability to influence or control others
 - Authority: the right to do so
 - Feminist and person-centered models
- Supervisor role:
 - Evaluating
 - Providing the evaluation to licensing boards and employers
- Supervisors must:
 - Inform supervisees of the evaluative nature regardless of theory
 - Be clear about goals, expectations, evaluation criteria, and limits of confidentiality in supervision

Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship

- Parallel process
 - Pay attention to the phenomenon to facilitate effective supervision
 - Encourage supervisee's personal insight
- Personhood
 - Beliefs, values, attitudes, gender, ethnicity, and spirituality
 - Be aware of bias and tendency to impose values
 - Religion, abortion, marriage and divorce, sexual orientation, parenting, spirituality, the change process, suicide, end-of life decision
 - Value free supervision is virtually impossible!!
 - Be aware, be willing to discuss issues openly as they arise, model value exploration in a way supervisees can use with clients

Characteristics that facilitate or hinder the supervision process

- Outstanding supervisors
 - Are self-aware, open to feedback, humble, and recognize there is always something to learn
 - Supervisees are active problem-solvers, and exude confidence and calmness
- Less-than-outstanding supervisors
 - Are rigid, closed to feedback, act as if they have all the answers, use supervision as a forum to display knowledge. Conflict with supervisees is common.

Characteristics that facilitate or hinder the supervision process

- Supervisor characteristics (Lowry) in order of importance
 - Good clinical skills/knowledge
 - An accepting supervisory climate
 - Desire to train/investment in supervision
 - Matching supervision with supervisees' development
 - Providing constructive feedback
 - Empathic
 - Flexible and available
 - Possessing good relationship skills
 - Experienced clinician

Characteristics that facilitate or hinder the supervision process

- Supervisor characteristics that have an adverse impact (in order)
 - Being judgmental/overly critical
 - Personally or theoretically rigid
 - Not committed to the supervisory process
 - Unavailable
 - Limited clinical knowledge and skills
 - Unethical or demonstrating poor boundaries
 - Too self-focused
 - Lack of compassion, arrogant, unable to provide helpful feedback, unprepared, inexperienced at supervision

Characteristics that facilitate or hinder the supervision process

- Supervisee characteristics that help the process
 - Desire to learn and improve
 - Nondefensive and open to feedback
 - General openness and flexibility
 - Possessing knowledge and good clinical skills
 - Intelligent
 - Responsible
 - Prepared
 - Willingness to take initiative and risks
 - Good interpersonal skills, ability to be empathic, self-acceptance, insight, genuineness, questioning, focus on the client, and maturity

Characteristics that facilitate or hinder the supervision process

- Supervisee characteristics that hinder the process
 - Lack of openness
 - Fear of evaluation
 - Personal rigidity
 - Defensiveness
 - Arrogance
 - Lack of motivation or interest in supervision or clinical work
 - Lack of intelligence
 - Psychopathology
 - Immaturity
 - Poor knowledge/skill base, poor interpersonal skills and boundaries, unprepared and disorganized, passive, lacking insight

Challenges

- Conflict
- Supervisees
 - Dealing with doubts and fears
 - Identifying unresolved personal problems
 - Avoiding the role of problem solver
 - Identifying countertransference
 - Respecting diverse value systems
 - Challenging yourself
- Supervisors
 - Supervisee anxiety
 - Supervisee reactions to client failures

Supervisor/Supervisee Compatibility

- Research has indicated that personal compatibility between supervisor and supervisee may affect evaluation
- Stable individual variables
 - Cognitive/learning style
- Attributes that change over time
 - Cognitive development
 - Experience in the field

Stable: Cognitive or Learning Styles

- Cognitive or learning style: represent ways in which individuals receive, interpret, store, and retrieve information
- MBTI and supervision (Ivey)
 - E – Extroversion/I- Introversion, S – Sensing/N - Intuiting, F- Feeling/T-Thinking, J-Judging/P-Perceiving
 - Most dramatic differences between supervisors and supervisees had to do with the T-F scale and J-P scale
 - While a T-J supervisor (most common profile) will find F supervisees frustrating, FP trainees may be more capable of achieving empathy with clients
 - Intuitive supervisees were found to receive more regard and evaluated as more competent than sensing trainees

Stable: Cognitive Orientation

- Supervisor must identify the primary orientation of each supervisee and assist each supervisee to become more flexible and to see the world from additional orientations to the ones that come naturally
- Orientations (Rigazio-Digilio et al.)
 - Sensorimotor: affected emotionally by experiences
 - Concrete: see the world through linear cause-effect lens
 - Formal: analyze the world from multiple perspectives and are naturally reflective
 - Dialectic: self-challenging, think about how they think, broad conceptualizations

Caution

- While learning-style models can be helpful and offer additional understanding of our supervisees, we must avoid
 - Cognitive stereotyping
 - Appreciate individual differences
 - Use the information as a guide to how we process information during supervision

May Change over Time

- Theoretical Orientation
 - The supervisor's theory is much more likely to drive supervision than is the supervisee's
 - Theoretical orientation (like the MBTI) often predicts supervisory style
 - We choose theories because they resonate with us
 - Supervisors may need to view alternative theoretical biases as true individual differences
- Cognitive Complexity (skill acquisition, developmental growth)

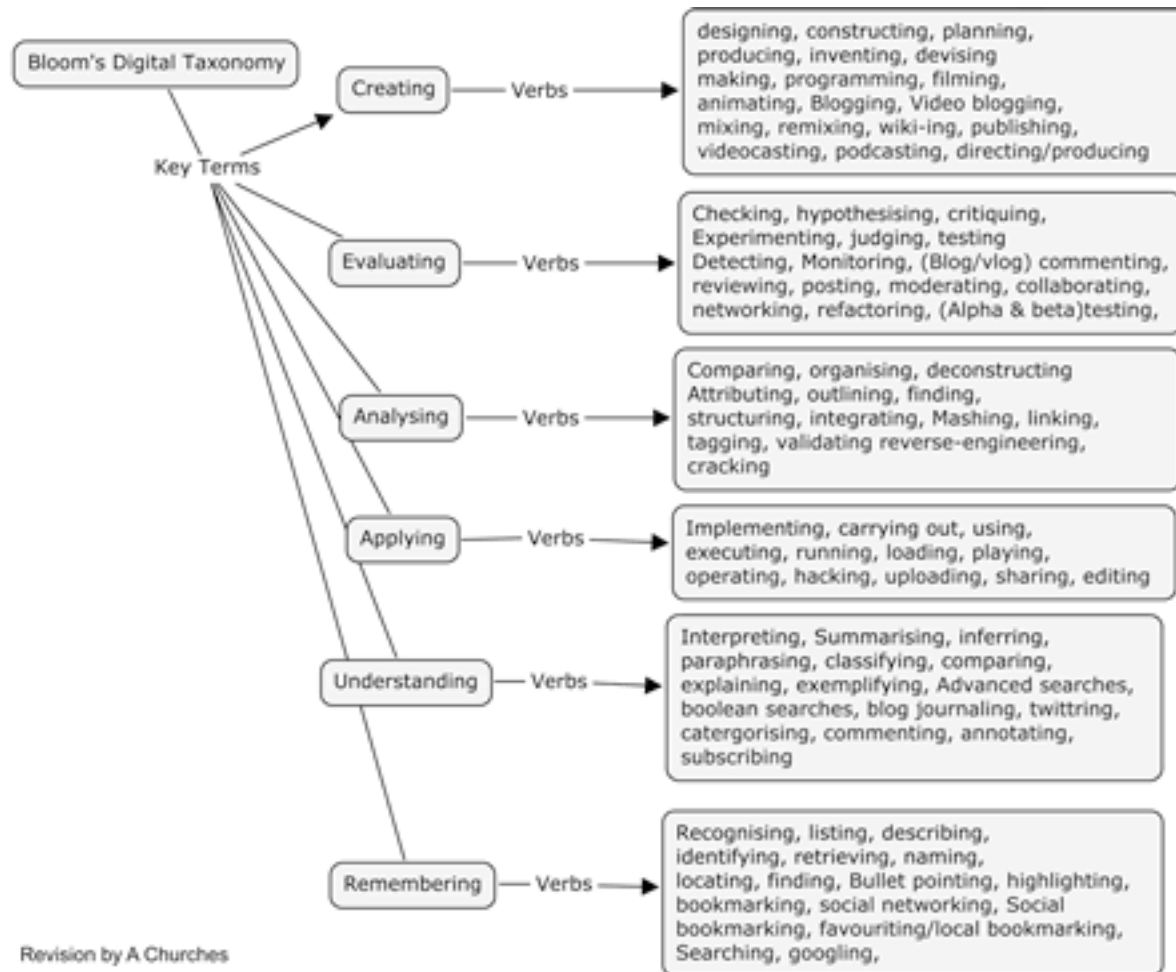
May Change Over Time

- Experience under supervision
 - Supervised experience results in developmental growth for trainees
 - Realize that supervisee development only BEGINS during formal training
- Supervisee need for Supervision direction
 - Novices may require more structure
 - Supervision of an advanced trainee may be more idiosyncratic
 - Experience level is typically paired with certain developmental characteristics

May Change Over Time:

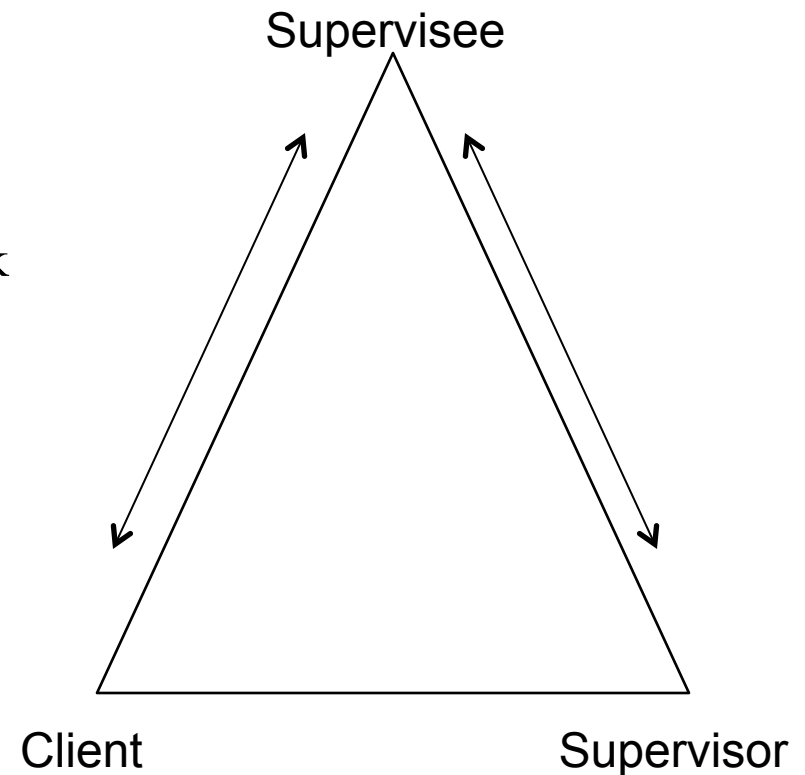
- Supervision environment
- Supervision Objectives
 - Bloom's taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy



Processes and Issues of the Supervisory Triad and Dyad

- Supervision as a triadic system
 - The client
 - Client - supervisee
 - Supervisee-supervisor
 - Supervisee is the common link



Processes and Issues of the Supervisory Triad and Dyad

- Parallel process
 - Some characteristic of the client-therapist interaction is repeated in supervision
 - Intrapsychic
- Isomorphism
 - In systems therapy, the “recursive replication” that occurs between therapy and supervision including: the need to join, setting goals, and thinking in stages
 - May replicate FOO patterns

Interpersonal Triangles

- Triangles are the fundamental unit of relationship
- In supervision
 - Client-counselor-supervisor
 - Least powerful member is the client, most powerful is the supervisor
 - Supervisor is unknown to the client
 - Supervisor must be aware of triangles, problematic or not
 - Used as a strategic intervention (“my supervisor thinks you ought to do this...”)
 - In a larger context “That’s not what my last supervisor said.”

The Supervisory Dyad

- Working alliance is a “collaboration to change”
 - Supervisor and supervisee agree on goals
 - Agree on tasks necessary to achieve those goals
 - The bond that develops between supervisor and supervisee
- Shared goals
 - Make supervisor and supervisee expectations explicit
 - Roles, behaviors
 - Assess supervisee’s expectations
 - Supervision contract

Supervisee ←————→ Supervisor

Part II Conflict

Problems arising in the supervisee and supervisor relationships

Review – Part I

- Phases of the relationship
- Essential elements of the supervisee-supervisor relationship
- The influence of individual and developmental differences
 - Cognitive Style
 - Cognitive Complexity
 - Theoretical Orientation
 - Cognitive Development
 - Level of Experience of the Supervisee
- Processes and issues of the supervisory triad and dyad

Conflicts Between Supervisor and Supervisee

- Unavoidable
 - Hierarchical
 - Evaluative
 - Two people will not always agree
- Desirable
 - Appropriate handling will strengthen collaboration
 - Supervision (like therapy) is a dynamic process
 - “God keep me from a [supervision] that goes well!”

Lesser, 1983

Conflict

- The manner in which conflict is resolved will dictate whether the relationship continues to grow and develop or stagnates
- 40% of supervisees in one study reported an impasse that lasted three to four weeks
- Some conflicts are never resolved
 - Conflict will affect the client relationship

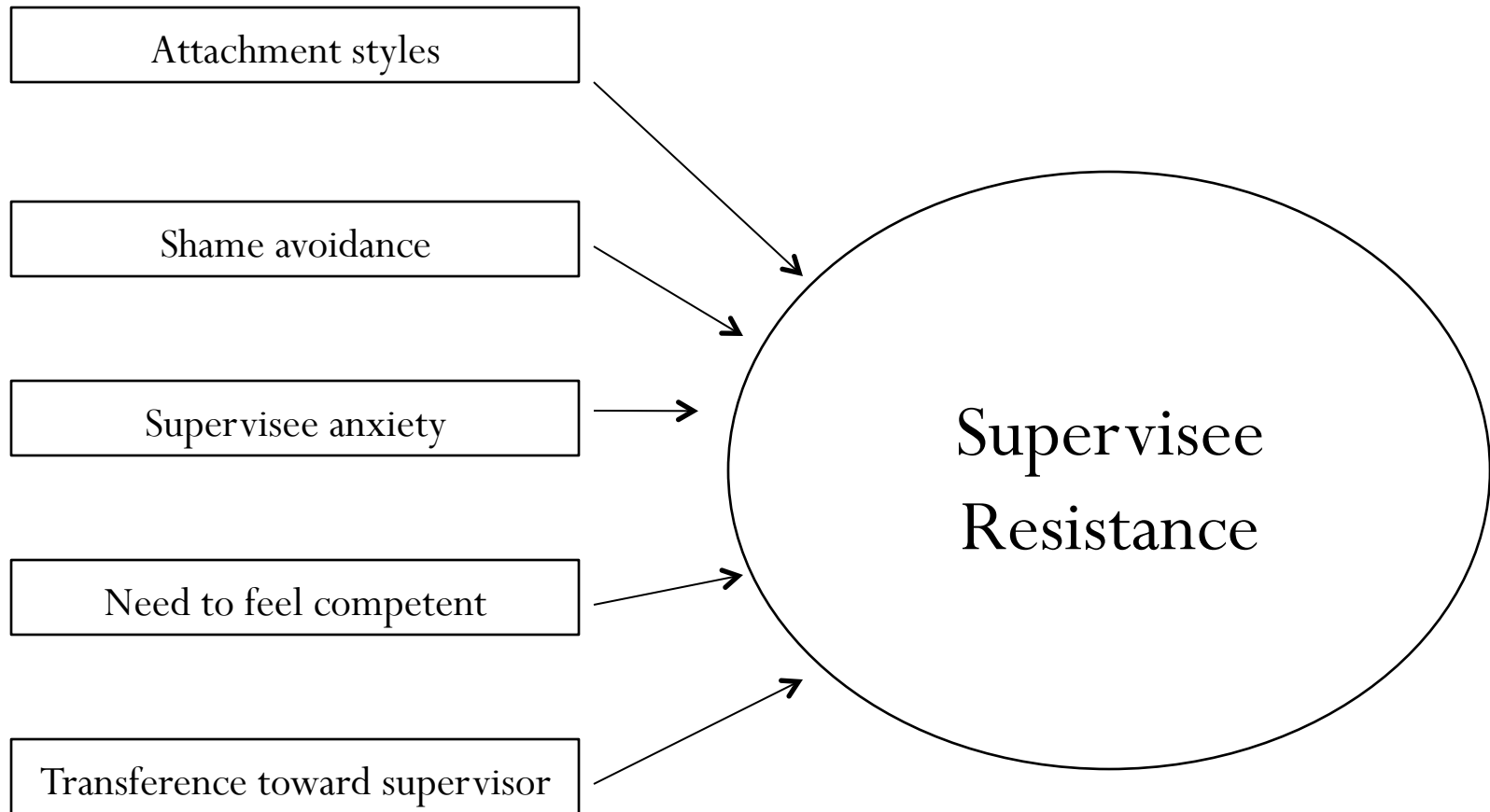
Types of Conflict

- Conflicts arising from miscommunications or mismatched expectations
 - Evaluative feedback
- Normative conflicts
 - Related to supervisee's developmental level
- Conflicts arising from participants' interpersonal dynamics
 - *Confrontation Rupture* and *Withdrawal Rupture*
 - Identify the reaction elicited by the response
 - Metacommunicate about the communication style exhibited

The Supervisee in the Relationship

- Supervisee resistance: self-protective behavior employed in the face of some threat
- A challenge to be overcome, NOT something the supervisee should be blamed for
 - Resist the influence of the supervisor or supervision itself
 - Non-compliant with tasks related to supervision
 - Non-compliant with client directives

Supervisee Resistance



The Supervisor in the Relationship

- Supervisor attachment
- Interpersonal power
- Supervisor countertransference

Conflicts Between Supervisor and Supervisee

- Recognize it – Supervisor's responsibility
- Name it
- Allow it
- Don't judge it
- Process it

CONFLICT WILL ALMOST ALWAYS NEED TO BE DEALT
WITH EXPLICITLY

Conflicts Between Supervisor and Supervisee

- Challenges for Supervisees
 - Dealing with doubts and fears
 - Avoiding the role of problem solver
 - Identifying countertransference
 - Respecting diverse value systems
 - Challenge yourself

Conflicts Between Supervisor and Supervisee

- Challenges for Supervisors
 - Supervisee anxiety
 - Supervisee's reactions to client failures

What to do when your supervisee is overly dependent

- Behaviors
 - What do I do now? How do you do this? I'm confused
 - Supervisee consistently defers to you / your opinion
 - I don't do this very well. You do this better than I do (comments designed to elicit a positive response).
- Response
 - Turn the question or statement back to the supervisee to encourage him/her to take responsibility
 - Be persistent and defer back. Explore the need to defer.
 - Don't respond. If it persists, discuss the dynamic directly.

What to do when your supervisee is overly dependent

- Behaviors
 - Transference – supervisee sees you as mom or dad
 - Need to make frequent contact with supervisor
 - Supervisor feels overly-responsible, overwhelmed, dislike/disrespect for supervisee (“this supervisee is high-maintenance”)
- Response
 - Process transference directly with supervisee
 - Help them understand “branch” and “root” decisions
 - Self-reflection and seek to understand your level of responsibility. Supervisors need supervision too! Establish new boundaries as necessary.

What to do when your supervisee is not taking risks in learning

- Most common in early developmental phase
- “If I disclose all of my weaknesses, my supervisor will think I am an incompetent counselor and [insert consequence]”
- Variables that influence risk-taking
 - Confidence,
 - Self-esteem
 - Courage

Encouraging supervisees to take risks

- If a dual relationship exists (professor/supervisor, program director/supervisor) process the implications openly and honestly
- Make risk-taking one of the goals in the supervision plan
- Maintain an open dialogue
- Encouragement vs praise
 - Focus on building an internal reward system
- Affirmation
 - Praise behavior, not the person

What to do when your supervisee feels anxious

- Encourage dialogue about fears
- Support
 - Understanding
 - Encouragement
 - Affirmation
- Use the role of consultant or collaborator
- Goal set in a way that makes tasks less formidable
- Clearly state expectations and provide clear relevant feedback
- Supervisor self-disclosure and humor

What to do when your supervisee is continually not prepared for supervision

- Define “being prepared”
- Help supervisees feel safe in supervision
 - Supervisees who are trying to hide their work may appear unprepared
- Explore personal issues that may be interfering with supervision and be prepared to refer
 - Discouragement
 - Disorganization
 - Lack of commitment

What to do when your supervisee says “let’s go grab a cup of coffee”

...or what to do when a dual relationship may cloud the supervisory relationship

- Respond in a fashion that
 - Will not compromise the gatekeeper/evaluative function of supervision
 - Reflects consideration of the supervisory relationship
 - Establishes a clear boundary in a respectful manner
- Document your decision
- It is the supervisor’s responsibility to manage the boundaries

What to do when your supervisee fails to follow policies or supervisor recommendations

- Restate the directive and ask how the supervisee will meet the requirement

“That sounds like a tough situation for you [insert tough situation here]. Since the rule has to be followed, how might you handle this another time?”

“I’m a bit troubled by this [failure to implement a suggested intervention]. This is the second time you haven’t followed what we discussed. What’s stopping you from doing this?”

- Avoid over-identification with the supervisee’s issues
- Be persistent in assisting the supervisee in reflecting on and adhering to obligations

What to do when your supervisee asks questions?

...or which questions merit answers, and which ones don't

- Question that merits a direct answer:

“How do I contact the state licensing board?”

- Questions that supervisors can answer, but the supervisee may be better served answering for him/herself:

“What else could I have done with this client?”

“Was that the correct response/intervention?”

“I've seen you respond successfully to other clients in similar situations. What makes this situation different?”

“What do you want to do?”

“What are you thinking and feeling when that happens?”

What to do when your supervisee takes responsibility for a client failure

....or “My client [relapsed, quit therapy, did not show up, did not complete an agreed-upon contract] and it’s all my fault!”

- Challenge supervisees to develop alternate explanations
- Challenge the supervisee to examine thinking errors:
 - I can help every client
 - If a client does not change, I must be incompetent
 - I can control my client’s life
- Explore supervisee’s fear and anxiety
- Support through encouragement and affirmation

What to do when you are attracted to a supervisee

- Sexual intimacy is forbidden, sexual attraction is not
 - It is a reality to be expected and managed
- Supervisor has the responsibility to manage the situation in an ethical manner and maintain appropriate boundaries
- When you sense a sexual attraction:
 - Supervisee → Supervisor
 - Discuss and possibly recommend therapy
 - Supervisor → Supervisee
 - Consult with peers/seek supervision
 - After consultation, you may choose to end the supervisory relationship
 - Document supervision

What to do when you are attracted to a supervisee

Situations to be watchful for:

- Similar age
- Shared sexual orientation
- Shared interests and values
- Invitations for social interaction
- Attending the same courses, conferences, social events
- Practicing in a rural area where dual relationships are difficult to avoid
- Vulnerable supervisees (newly relocated, divorced)
- Business arrangements

What to do when you are attracted to a supervisee

Situations to be watchful for:

- Asking to or being asked to keep an activity secret
- Asking for or accepting a favor
- Feelings of physical attraction
- Transient feelings of sexual attraction

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