

Practice Guidance: Group Supervision

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Prompts in the Office

Consider including the following visual reminders of practice values in the office:

- 1. Posters reflecting organizational values, practice principles, research findings, tips, etc.**
- 2. Display art reflecting practice values – such as images of extended family, children with their families, respecting differences**

Managing the emotional tone of the forum

- 1. DO remember that it is entirely appropriate for social workers to seek case consultation because they are worried about or frustrated working with the family. There are usually very legitimate reasons for these emotional responses. Exploring the practitioner's concerns or frustration can provide valuable information and insight about the family's situation and the social worker's needs for support.**
- 2. DO acknowledge significant situations that could distract group members (i.e.: difficult medical treatment, illness of a parent or child). It is unnecessary to talk about the situation at length; merely acknowledging it can be supportive to the person, and demonstrates concern by the other group members. Of course, this ought to occur with the permission of the person experiencing the situation.**

- 3. DO guard against unproductive storytelling or venting about families. These are time wasters and discussion can become disrespectful. Re-direct participants to productive conversation.**
- 4. DO use respectful language to refer to families. Speak about the family as if the family were in the meeting:**
 - a. Avoid acronyms.**
 - b. Replace adjectives “resistant” or “uncooperative” with “fearful” or “reluctant” when referring to families. This helps model a respectful and hopeful attitude toward families and engages creativity around challenges.**
- 5. DO slow down the temptation to “rush to judgment” or “rush to action” (such as removal). Prematurely rushing to solutions without a full understanding of the problem/challenge can have significant and long lasting impact on families.**
 - a. Remind social workers that the family has resources (e.g. kin support), and taking the time to identify those resources often results in good planning and outcomes for the family.**
- 6. DO notice when and if a social worker engages in behavior that is damaging to the group process, and your efforts at modeling and directing the conversation are without effect; it may be necessary to make note of the behavior, and talk with the social worker about it in an individual conference.**

Guiding discussion

- 1. Group supervision for the purpose of case consultation can be conducted for a variety of reasons. The purpose of the case consultation determines the type of information to be included in discussion.**
 - a. Full consult for intake/assessment, or ongoing cases (consider all new assignments)**

- b. Follow up consult – to develop risk statements, safety plan considerations, step-down safety plan, etc.**
 - c. Consult regarding a worrisome or frustrating aspect of the case**
 - d. Specialized consult on specific types of cases (intimate partner violence, sexual abuse)**
 - e. Consult to consider major case decision such as court action, seeking termination of parental rights, etc.**
 - f. Consult to showcase good practice**
 - g. Consult to consider case closing**
- 2. When in doubt, or when the conversation is “stuck”:**
 - a. Ask a clarifying question**
 - b. Return to the purpose of the consult to refocus**
- 3. Refrain from using “why” and “did you” questions.**
 - a. “Why” questions may shut down exposure of practice**
 - b. Use “What”, “Where”, “How” questions instead (“What do we know about...” “Tell us what has been done to help this family....”**
- 4. Maintain an upbeat, relaxed tone of voice and posture**
 - a. Use hands in an open, receiving manner**
 - b. Encourage participation of all group members, and communicate your confidence in the social worker.**
- 5. When information or explanations come fast, consider slowing down the pace in order to allow enough time for everyone to fully understand the information. This also models careful listening to each other.**
 - a. Pause and ask the social worker how he/she would like you to write the information within the framework structure. This prompt can assist the social worker summarize and clarify his/her thoughts. For example:**
 - How would you like this to be written?**

- Consider floating a suggestion, “What do you think about writing it this way....?”
 - b. Ask questions for clarification or amplification
6. Prompt for consideration of another viewpoint (this is one of the most important benefits of group supervision). For example, ask the social worker to consider an idea you have; state it tentatively:
- a. “I’d like to ask about this because I am unsure....,”
 - b. “I’ve been thinking about it this way.... however I may have it wrong.”
7. Refrain from putting the social worker on the spot. Invite dialogue by asking clarifying questions, or questions/suggestions to keep the conversation moving along. Examples:
- a. “What do you think about...?”
 - b. “How about using this as a working agenda for now? We can move on and then return if needed?”
8. Use and help social workers reframe language to resolve issues/problems in the future, rather than focusing on past mistakes
- a. “What additional information do we need to gather?” rather than, “Why didn’t you get complete assessment information?”
 - b. “What efforts can we make to engage the father” rather than “Why hasn’t the father been engaged up to this point?”
9. Frame questions, suggestions in terms of what *to do* rather than what *not to do*. Give cues to workers on how to formulate and refine these statements.
- a. “Hands off discipline” rather than “no more spanking”.
 - b. “Let’s see if we can understand this mother’s anger towards her son,” rather than “We should not be so negative about this mother.”

- 10. Avoid engaging in “what if” discussions, as this kind of speculation can result in plans or decisions that are unsuitable for the real problem. Instead, probe for more information, and/or develop a plan for gathering more information upon which to make a reasoned decision.**

Ending the Consult

- 1. At the end of the consult check with the presenting social worker to determine if she/he received the help she/he needed. If the social worker was unsatisfied with the result, ask what would have been more helpful.**

(Lohrbach in collaboration with the Institute for Human Services, Ohio)