



**Improving Clinical Supervisory Practice in Front Line CPS Supervisors: A Mentoring Model**

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# Improving Clinical Supervisory Practice in Front Line CPS Supervisors: A Mentoring Model

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## Rationale and Need for Intervention

Child abuse and neglect in the United States is a problem of staggering size and potential impact on the quality of life for many of America's children. With as many as three million reports of suspected maltreatment and one million substantiated reports each year, the need for quality child protective services (CPS) practices is obvious (Child Abuse and Neglect Fact Sheet, American Humane Society, FY 2001). In SFY 2001, Arkansas had 18,088 reports of suspected maltreatment referred for investigation and assessment, of which 5,771 were substantiated and some protective intervention(s) was initiated (DHS Annual Report Card, SFY 2001).

Many variables impact the effective provision of quality child protective services. Based on the work of the Southern Regional Quality Improvement Center's needs assessment (SR QIC, 2001), one area that deserves exploration and formalized study is the impact of structured frontline CPS casework supervision approaches. It is hypothesized that structured CPS casework supervision approaches will:

1. positively affect child protection worker practice in assessment and intervention with families;
2. positively affect client outcomes, due in part to improved assessment and interventions; and
3. positively affect preventable worker turnover due to increased sense of supervisory support as measured by increased regularity, standardized content and promotion of clearer understanding of core practice expectations.

The literature review completed by SR QIC graphically highlights the critical impact of the supervisory relationship on effective performance of job duties, job satisfaction, staff turnover, worker skill and, subsequently, client outcomes. This social work literature review is congruent with other disciplines regarding the importance of the supervisory relationship. New CPS workers may frequently enter the field with unrealistic expectations. Ostroff and Kozlowski (1992) indicated that enhanced learning occurs when supervisors and coworkers are proactive and establish a mutual

exchange of information. The proactive efforts of supervisors are more critical to newcomer adjustment because the supervisor can assist in shaping perceptions. The study results imply that the potential detrimental effects of unmet expectations can be overcome via a quality relationship with one's supervisor. It seems likely that as the newcomers' perspective begins to converge with the more normative view offered by the supervisor, naïve prior expectations are cast aside. Expectations remain unmet, but newcomers who have quality relationships with supervisors are better able to overcome reality shock and become adjusted to their new roles (Louis, 1980). Munson (1995) suggests that worker *interaction* with his or her supervisor increases worker satisfaction. If the interaction is perceived as supportive rather than punitive, worker satisfaction is increased. If worker satisfaction is increased, it is hypothesized that turnover will be reduced.

Kadushin (1992) identified three primary functions of supervision – administration, support, and education. Due to a variety of factors, CPS casework supervision has had an inordinate emphasis on the supervisory function of administration. This overemphasis of one function has minimized the importance of the other two functions, the functions that are most likely to enhance the supervisor/worker relationship. The formal training Arkansas supervisors have received in the past has focused primarily on their administrative functions and less on the functions of support and education. It has not been tied to competencies related to the support and education functions of supervision. When asked to identify elements of supervision that were unavailable or ineffectively provided *for supervisors*, Arkansas supervisors listed mentoring, policy clarification and on job training (SR QIC, 2001), (Brownlee, 2002). In light of these lacks and the emphasis of past training, it is anticipated that Arkansas supervisory practice is currently most reflective of the triage approach, with emphasis on documentation and case management.

Munson (1995) suggests that effective supervision is focused around five key concepts: structure, regularity,

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consistency, case oriented and evaluation. He focuses on the educational nature of the supervisor/supervisee relationship. These concepts would appear to mesh well with the model of parallel process proposed by Kane (1991). In addition, they are supported by the work on competency based training for supervisors that emphasize the need to review all cases, structured case review, and facilitation of self-awareness (Bernatovicz and Barkley, 1996).

In order to be supportive of workers, supervisors must themselves feel supported. Gleeson and Philbin (1996) recommend support and mentoring for supervisors. Effective mentoring can result in a reduction of job related stress (Sosik and Godshalk, 2000). Supervisors in Arkansas rarely have an advanced degree or formal training in theories of supervision. In addition, many have been promoted into supervisory positions with relatively little experience working with CPS clients. The specific techniques associated with effective clinical supervision may be new to many front line supervisors. Brief classroom training alone is insufficient to teach supervisors these techniques. Through mentoring, supervisors can make the transition from theory to practice. They will then be able to assist in passing these skills to the worker. Without the support of the mentor, attempting to learn and apply new techniques may be more stress inducing than relieving.

### **Project Design and Scope**

The Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services has a long-standing IV-E partnership with universities in the state. The Division and its partners propose a model of supervision that incorporates the interactional and educational components described by Shulman (1993) and Munson (1995), where supervision reflects the parallel process between worker-supervisor and worker-client relationship along with the support element provided through a mentor. The proposal will examine the five key concepts of supervision identified by Munson (structure, regularity, consistency, case orientation, and evaluation). Specific techniques will be implemented with the goal of improving the supervisor's knowledge and ability to teach supervisees accurate assessment skills. More accurate assessment will result in better case plans and improved client outcomes related to permanency, safety and well-being.

Workers will benefit from regular, structured, supportive contact with the supervisor, which will improve the relationship between the worker and the supervisor. In theory, the enhanced relationship will result in greater job satisfaction and a corresponding decrease in worker turnover. Supervisors may tend to fall back on their previous skills as direct workers and treat supervisees as if they were working with families. This design is to assist on enhancing knowledge and expand teaching skills in their ability to coach their staff

In order to test the design, a group of twenty (20) experienced supervisors will receive formal classroom training on competencies associated with the support and education functions of supervisors and an introduction to the supervisory model. For the purpose of this study, an experienced supervisor is defined as a supervisor with at least one year's supervisory experience at the beginning of the project. Supervisors will be selected from three areas in the state. These areas reflect both rural and metropolitan practice areas. Supervisors who are selected will have the primary job duty of supervising family service workers who delivery protective services (as opposed to solely foster care or investigations). The classroom component is intended to introduce supervisors to the mentoring model. However, this training is not the primary intervention.

The primary intervention in this model involves pairing the supervisors with an experienced mentor. Mentoring is defined as a deliberate pairing of a more skilled or experienced person with a lesser skilled or experienced one, with the agreed-upon goal of having the lesser skilled person grow and develop specific competencies (Murray, 1991). The mentors will teach supervisors how to structure a supervisory session, how to be supportive of workers, and how to teach the workers skills necessary for working with families. The specific competencies that the experienced supervisors will develop are enhanced knowledge of the importance of the supervisory roles of education and support, perfecting clinical practice methods and modeling the supportive functions. Supervisors in the target group would receive regular, structured, consistent and case-specific field education and mentoring for the period of one year. The preferred frequency would be weekly, but time and distance in rural areas may necessitate that the

frequency is every other week. The *assumption* is that interaction with the field educator has the same benefit for a supervisor as interaction with a supervisor has for a worker. Supervisors would have regularly scheduled, face-to-face individual sessions with the field educator/mentor. These interactions between the supervisor and the mentor mirror the desired interaction between the supervisor and the worker and between the worker and the CPS families. Supervisors in the target group would receive on-going field education and mentoring for the period of three years.

Supervisors would be exposed to theory and research specific to CPS practice through a series of on-line educational offerings. These offerings are brief tutorials. There is a pre-assessment of current knowledge, written material summarizing supervisory theory, and a post assessment. Supervisors would meet for peer group supervision twice a month via compressed interactive video (CIV) to discuss the application of the research to a case scenario or supervisory situation. The field educator/mentors would facilitate these sessions. On-line offerings will be developed by the IV-E partnership universities and other community providers, such as hospitals, community mental health centers, domestic violence shelters and/or substance abuse programs. Offerings would be available to all supervisors in the test group regardless of the university initiating the educational unit. To align with the design, topics include:

Supervisors in the project group would be expected to demonstrate the following behaviors:

- Conduct formal, regularly scheduled, face-to-face individual supervisory sessions with protective service workers. The preferred frequency would be weekly, but time and distance in rural areas may necessitate that the frequency is every other week.
- Review every case on the worker's caseload, not just cases in crises. This review will utilize a uniform instrument or outline to increase the likelihood of consistency in the approach and tone of supervision.
- Keep the focus of the session on the specifics of the case(s), while modeling the techniques and skills that the supervisor would expect the worker to demonstrate in work with CPS families. These skills are set out in greater detail below.

- Observe workers in their interactions with clients in order to be able to offer feedback and suggestion.
- Receive periodic feedback from supervisees on the supervisory techniques.
- Participate in on-line learning opportunities and group supervisory sessions.

Field educators would model/teach the following techniques and skills, which supervisors need in order to be able to fulfill the expectations set out above.

These techniques include:

- demonstrate/model an individual supervisory session,
- reflect a strengths-based supervisory process (parallel to the approach to clients espoused in the Division's mission statement),
- assist supervisors to identify mutually satisfactory goals, objectives, tasks for supervision (parallel to case planning with families),
- develop and use a standard case review format,
- model/teach the practice skills of tuning in to workers, empathic responding and active listening,
- periodically review supervisor's progress,
- demonstrate/model techniques designed to develop the supervisor's critical thinking skills and assist the supervisor to use these techniques with workers (such as Socratic questioning, generating multiple hypotheses, and encouraging a broad view of assessment and risk.),
- critique performance of the skill/task and make suggestions for improvement,
- partner with supervisors to identify entities in the community that would have access to research or theory that could enhance front line practice, and facilitate the development of teaching material that could be incorporated into web-based learning modules, and
- facilitate a peer discussion/case presentation to apply theory or research from formal educational offerings to real-life situations.

DCFS contracts with the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) Department of Social Work and MidSOUTH Center for Leadership and Training to deliver all DCFS new staff training. Trainings are provided to Family Service Workers (FSW), Social Service Aides (SSA), and FSW Supervisors, as well as to fos-

ter/adoptive parents and Arkansas State Police child abuse hotline operators and investigators. MidSOUTH provides continuing education for DCFS staff and foster parents to help meet the number of hours of training mandated on an annual basis. DCFS contracts with UAF to manage the Arkansas Academic Partnership in Public Child Welfare. This statewide collaboration among Arkansas universities and DCFS focuses on education and training to improve child welfare practice. These existing relationships and supports provide the time and capacity to guide the project, mentor staff and supervisors involved in this effort. The two (2) universities will provide supervision to the field educator/mentors. A joint job description and discussion of the intervention counties will be developed between the two universities. The qualifications of staff will be LCSW preferred with experience in practice and theory of supervision.

### **Strength of Collaboration**

In addition to the partnership with the universities, DCFS has existing partnerships throughout the state that would enhance the success of this project. One such partnership is the Arkansas Commission on Child Abuse, Rape and Domestic Violence (hereafter referenced as the commission). The commission is a governor-appointed committee of volunteers from the state with expertise in child abuse, rape and domestic violence. The commission functions as the statewide task force for the Children's Justice Act (CJA) grant in Arkansas. As such, it is charged with recommending changes that will improve all systems that intervene to ensure the permanency, safety and well being of abused and neglected children. The Child Abuse Committee of the commission is composed of professionals from

throughout the state with knowledge and expertise in child maltreatment. The Child Abuse Committee serves as a consultant to 25 multidisciplinary child abuse teams (MDTs) in the state and oversees three citizen review panels. It is the working arm of the commission in matters related to child maltreatment. As such it forwards recommendations to the full commission.

The Child Abuse Committee of the commission will serve in an advisory capacity to this project. As such, it will review the proposal, receive copies of reports and make suggestions and recommendations for education and training that would improve supervisory practice of front-line CPS supervisors. Members of the Child Abuse Committee will write tutorials in their areas of expertise to develop supervisors' knowledge of current research and practice in child welfare issues. In addition, the commission may be in a position to recommend legislation or policy changes to remove barriers to effective practice.

### **Benefits to the Division**

The increased demands on and complex needs of the children, youth and families served by our workers and supervisors require staff to have a range of professional competencies. Supervision is the key to providing competent goal-directed services. Supervisors need to support and motivate and at the same time comply with administrative demands. The division is currently reviewing all practices and policies as we implement our state's Program Improvement Plan and as we move toward accreditation with Council on Accreditation for Children and Families. As this model progresses and benefits are identified from the interventions applied, we modify existing training and enhance support activities needed to cultivate and sustain our staff.

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