



ISSUE BRIEF

HEALTHY ORGANIZATIONS

What are preliminary building blocks to **strengthen quality supervision?**

Investing in supervisory quality can help an agency protect itself from high turnover. We hear often that staff don't leave their agencies, they leave their supervisors. Supervisors matter to staff, and staff matter to children and families. When staff leave, agencies have to spend more money on recruiting, hiring and onboarding their replacements, and children and families suffer. Children end up staying longer in care, and parents don't have a consistent, supportive professional at their side to help them prepare for and navigate the reunification process.

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Importance of supervision in child welfare

Investing in the quality and capacity of child welfare supervisors is one of the most important strategic steps a child welfare leader can take.¹ Supervisors affect not only the quality and effectiveness of casework staff in their work with vulnerable children and families, but they influence staff retention and organizational climate and culture as well.² Supervisors serve myriad functions: they can act as a bridge between new agency policies and how they may be implemented on the frontline; they translate new research findings and their infusion into interventions with children and families; and they mediate between higher-level leadership priorities and how they are received and understood by front-line staff.

The backbone of a child welfare agency's organizational structure and effectiveness is the child welfare unit, which reflects an effective child welfare supervisor.³ Without manageable supervisor-supervisee ratios, supervisors do not have the time to provide high-quality, supportive, and timely supervision and coaching.⁴ They cannot adequately monitor their supervisees' case activities and progress, which affects the quality and effectiveness

of services delivered. The two established sources for supervisory ratio standards, the Child Welfare League of America and the Council on Accreditation, both identify the best practice standard for supervisor-supervisee ratios in child and family services to be 1:5.^{5,6}

Investing in a diverse array of supervisory supports

Supporting supervisors in their critical role within an agency is as important as maintaining best practice standards for supervisor-supervisee ratios. Many jurisdictions have made significant investments in strengthening the quality and capacity of their front-line supervisory level. Below are specific examples of jurisdictional strategies for strengthening quality supervision.

Defining what is expected of supervisors and training them to meet those expectations

Several jurisdictions^{7,8,9,10} relied on workgroups or committees to review and revamp policies and procedures related to performance expectations of supervisors. As part of the revamping, the agencies



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defined supervisory role expectations (e.g., purpose of supervision, frequency of supervision, and activities that should occur during supervision). In addition, the agencies prepared supervisors to meet these expectations by training them on and providing written guidance about the revised policies and procedures and the activities that should occur during supervision.

Training supervisors to use data when meeting with caseworkers

In addition to providing training to meet supervisory expectations, several jurisdictions^{7,8,9,10} trained supervisors to use data as part of their discussions during one-on-one supervision with caseworkers. These data may come from multiple sources, including: case-level data from an information system, performance data for an individual worker, agency case reviews, and national federal reports on outcomes. Agencies also provided supplementary support to supervisors through the availability of coaches, mentors, or quality improvement staff.

Providing tools and resources to supervisors for use when meeting with workers

Many jurisdictions^{7,8,9,11} created toolkits or other written resources that supervisors can use to guide their one-on-one or group supervision with caseworkers. These toolkits include items such as detailed guidance on how to prepare for these discussions (e.g., defining the purpose and assigning roles for each group supervision session), reflective questions to lead these discussions, and detailed checklists to ensure that all cases are reviewed and action steps are clear and tracked.

Providing supervision to supervisors

As surprising as it may seem, several jurisdictions^{7,8,9} had to undertake specific efforts to ensure that supervisors received regular supervision from their managers. These agencies have specified the purpose, frequency, and length of time for this supervision; provided detailed guidance and topics for these

interactions (e.g., caseloads, staff performance issues, agency policy updates); and noted whether and when these interactions should be one-on-one or group based.

Coaching supervisors

At least one jurisdiction⁹ developed a coaching model for supervisors, in addition to the supervision supervisors receive from their managers. The coaching efforts are intended to support supervisors as they lead their unit in the implementation of new initiatives.

Providing materials, tools, and activities for supervisors to support on-the-job training for caseworkers

Several jurisdictions^{10,12,13} also developed tools and activities that supervisors can use with new caseworkers, who are still in an on-the-job training period. These tools provide background to supervisors about the classroom-based training caseworkers receive and suggest transfer-of-learning activities that supervisors can assign to caseworkers that align with these trainings. Some jurisdictions have taken steps to ensure supervisors receive the same or shortened supervisory versions of the training provided to caseworkers to ensure supervisors can support and promote application in the field. Other approaches have included jointly reviewing handouts provided during training and discussing the information and its implications for casework practice or jointly visiting service providers working with a family on the caseworker's caseload to discuss service treatment goals and tracking parents' progress.

Additional resources and jurisdictional information

In 2011, the National Resource Center for Organizational Improvement conducted a scan for information on how states train and support their supervisors. Specific information about how states have approached strengthening their supervision can be found in the resources below.

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STATE APPROACHES TO STRENGTHENING SUPERVISORY SUPPORT

APPROACH	SUMMARY OF INITIATIVES
Pre-Service Training	http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/SupervisionProject/PreserviceTraining.pdf
Ongoing Training	http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/SupervisionProject/OngoingTraining.pdf
Supervisor Requirements	http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/SupervisionProject/SupervisorRequirements.pdf
Professional Development	http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/SupervisionProject/SupervisorProfessionalDevelopment.pdf
Supports for Supervisors	http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/SupervisionProject/SupervisorSupports.pdf

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- National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2017a). Organizational support & turnover intention. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Org_Environment/Kim_Mor_Barak_2015.pdf; National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2017b). Turnover intention predictors. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Retention/Kim_Kao_2015.pdf
- National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2016). *Supervision*. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Supervision_Perf_Management/1-page_summary_Hannah_and_Potter_2012.pdf
- National Child Welfare Workforce Institute. (2012). *Supportive supervision*. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Strengthsbased_Supervision_1pager_24.pdf
- Child Welfare League of America. (n.d.) *Standards of excellence for child welfare services*. Retrieved from <http://www.cwla.org/our-work/cwla-standards-of-excellence/standards-of-excellence-for-child-welfare-services>
- Council on Accreditation. (n.d.) *Standards for public agencies: PA-PDS 3: Leadership support of supervisors*. Retrieved from <http://coanet.org/standard/pa-pds/3/>, para. 7
- Alaska Office of Children's Services. (2011). *Supervisors' strategic plan 2010-2014*. Retrieved from <http://dhss.alaska.gov/ocs/Documents/Publications/pdf/strategicplan.pdf>
- Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division. (2012). *Improving supervision by collaboration, transparency & accountability: The impact of Missouri's supervision advisory committee* (as part of NCWWI webinar). Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/39008098>; Missouri Department of Social Services, Children's Division. (2015, February 26).
- Clinical supervision process and guide (Memorandum)*. Retrieved from <https://dss.mo.gov/cd/info/memos/2015/cd15-012.pdf>
- Munson, S. (2016). *NJ DCF workforce report: A commitment to child welfare excellence through comprehensive workforce & leadership development*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers School of Social Work, Institute for Families. Retrieved from http://www.nj.gov/dcf/childdata/exitplan/NJ.DCF.Workforce.Report_2015-2016.pdf
- University of Iowa School of Social Work, National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice. (2009). *Committed to excellence through supervision: Supervisor developmental planning and support toolkit*. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Supervision_Perf_Management/Developmental_Planning_and_Support_Toolkit.pdf
- Oklahoma Department of Human Services. (2012). *Supervisor and mentor guide*. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Supervision_Perf_Management/Supervisor_and_Mentor_Guide_-_OK.pdf
- Public Child Welfare Training Academy. (2009). *Key to success. Transfer of learning: A tool for child welfare supervisors*. San Diego, CA: Academy for Professional Excellence. Retrieved from http://ncwwi.org/files/Supervision_Perf_Management/Keys_to_Success_-_TOL.doc

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