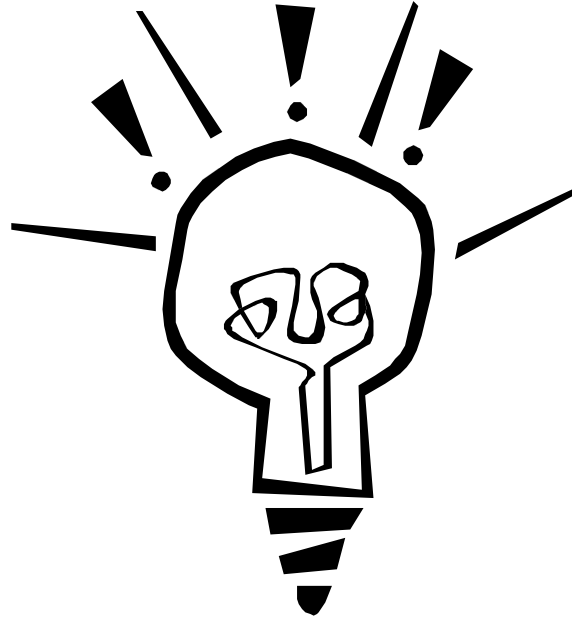


A survival guide for youth workers



# professional supervision

Youth Action & Policy Association NSW  
[www.yapa.org.au](http://www.yapa.org.au)

*A survival guide for youth workers:*

## **Professional supervision**

### **Other survival guides from YAPA:**

- Getting started
- Legal & ethical issues
- Using the media
- Advocacy & lobbying

available from [www.yapa.org.au/youthwork](http://www.yapa.org.au/youthwork)

### **YAPA**

YAPA is the peak community group working in the interests of young people and youth services in NSW.

YAPA strives to achieve social justice for young people, including the appropriate provision of services for young people.

The role of YAPA is to:

- Monitor and respond to government policies and proposals affecting young people
- Promote and advocate on issues affecting young people and youth services
- Bring young people and youth workers together to act on issues affecting them
- Work to raise a positive profile of young people in the media and in the community
- Provide training, forums and conferences to young people and youth workers
- Provide information and referral
- Produce a range of resources, publications and newsletters.

If you would like to get involved, support us or become a member please give us a call!

# PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

Youth work can be an incredibly rewarding, it can also be incredibly challenging!

As a worker you are likely to face a large number of expectations from the young people you work with, your co-workers, your management committee, outside stakeholders such as the local Council and police, your personal relationships such as family members, friends and partners. As a worker you also need to deal with your own expectations of what you can achieve at work.

If you are a solo worker or work in a rural area you may have limited opportunities for professional development, mentoring or networking with other youth work professionals.

The young people you work with may face a wide range of complex problems issues including risky alcohol or other drug use.

Much of your work is probably focused on supporting others and your own support needs are probably given little attention.

For all these reasons it is important for you to get the support you need.

## **What is professional supervision?**

Professional supervision can be defined as a worker meeting with an independent person who has greater experience, skills or knowledge to reflect on their work practice so that they can improve the way they help others.

Professional supervision happens outside of your workplace in a confidential setting and **is different to the supervision you might receive from your work supervisor, boss or management committee.**

Professional supervision happens on a regular basis and often involves payment to the professional supervisor. In some cases a worker may be able to be a professional supervisor as part of their current work duties and does not need to be paid by the supervisee.

## **What if I feel a bit apprehensive about supervision?**

If you haven't received professional supervision before, or if you have had a negative experience of supervision you may be feeling a bit apprehensive about the whole concept.

Many workers feel this way before they start supervision, however, once they have participated in a good professional supervision session they find supervision to be a rewarding experience that provides them with the support they need. We have included a personal story of a youth worker which talks about this a bit more.

Supervision is about taking care of yourself, being self aware and developing in your skills. Lack of supervision can lead workers to feel unappreciated, defensive and can contribute to worker burn out.

## ***One youth worker's story of supervision***

Before I went to supervision for the first time I was very nervous. I was told by my management committee that I had to go. I had this notion that I needed to have problems or worries to go. I was worried about what I would have to talk about and if I would have to come across as really smart and have all the answers.

When I went to my first supervision session my supervisor showed me that she was interested in me, my position, what I did, my relationship to other services and workers. She was there for me, not for my management committee. It is important to have someone neutral without vested interests. I didn't have to have all the answers, her sole purpose was in helping me and giving me direction. She just made me see all the answers already in my head.

Over the month I would think about concerns, pressing issues. She would start by saying "So what has been happening for you?". I told her about what I had been doing, any issues, current work commitments, then we would talk about what I should realistically commit to. A supervisor is someone to offer you support, not give advice, it is a second opinion. Lots of times I came away doing what I was planning to do anyway but I felt better about it. If I was unsure about something I could run it by her. It is really good for solo workers to get it off your chest, not offending anyone because your supervisor doesn't know the people. You can complain and look at ways of dealing with it because you still have to work with them.

My suggestion for getting a supervisor is to find someone you respect and take seriously as a worker. It's no good to just have a friend because they are not neutral and may just take your side. It is good to have someone neutral to your service or network to give you an honest outside opinion. At first someone from my management committee wanted to do supervision but I said no because what if I had a problem with the management committee at same stage in the future.

It's not true that if you have worked in the sector for ages it won't be beneficial. I know one worker who has worked in the sector for a long time, she started to go to supervision and has improved.

### **What does it say about me as a worker if I receive supervision?**

Receiving supervision shows that you are committed to delivering high quality services for young people by reflecting on and continually improving your work practice. It shows a professional attitude towards work and a desire to further develop your skills and knowledge.

Supervision is about reflecting on your achievements and successes and gaining recognition and a sense of completion for the valuable work you do.

Receiving supervision shows you are being responsible for your own health and wellbeing by preventing burnout, debriefing and gaining the support you deserve.

### **How do I go about finding a supervisor?**

Finding a supervisor is a bit like buying a car, don't buy the first car you see in the car yard!

Ask potential supervisors to outline their:

- experience and understanding of community based youth work
- experience and knowledge of AOD issues, including how they keep their skills and knowledge up to date
- experience and training in providing professional supervision
- theoretical approach to supervision
- limits regarding confidentiality
- availability at the times you are available
- cost for service

Take a test drive – you may have to attend a number of supervision sessions with a few different people before you find someone who has the approach and skills that suit you.

It is preferable that the person providing professional supervision is an independent person outside of your organization, and ideally outside of your existing youth workers network.

### **Learning styles**

Adult learning theories have identified a number of different ways that adults learn. For example, some workers prefer discussing theories and their application to their work, others prefer to reflect on their feelings and experiences, others enjoy interactive team activities while others prefer to sit back, listen and observe.

You should be familiar with your learning style as this will help you find a model of supervision that works well for you.

If you are not familiar with your learning style you can download a free test from Planning for Learning at Work from <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/Content/phd-pub-illicit-tfwi1-cnt.htm>

### **Attending the first supervision meeting**

When attending a first supervision meeting it can be helpful to discuss what you have found helpful and what you have found unhelpful about past supervisory experiences. This will provide some guidance to the supervisor about your learning style.

A useful exercise for the first supervision meeting is to discuss your workplace and job responsibilities and what you would like to learn, improve, influence and achieve at work.

This discussion can generate a number of goals for you to work towards during supervision and back at work.

Remember that useful goals are SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time measured.

## Setting goals for my work

	<i>I would like to learn</i>	<i>I would like to improve</i>	<i>I would like to influence</i>	<i>I would like to achieve</i>
<p><b>Aim</b></p> <p><i>What do I want to achieve?</i></p>				
<p><b>Measure</b></p> <p><i>How will I know that I have achieved this?</i></p>				
<p><b>Strategy</b></p> <p><i>What steps will I take to achieve it?</i></p>				
<p><b>Timeframe</b></p> <p><i>When will I achieve it?</i></p>				

## Setting goals for my work (an example)

	<i>I would like to learn</i>	<i>I would like to improve</i>	<i>I would like to influence</i>	<i>I would like to achieve</i>
<p><b>Aim</b></p> <p><i>What do I want to achieve?</i></p>	How to better respond to young people disclosing about their drug use	My report writing to the management committee	My team mates about the importance of taking a consistent approach to behaviour management	A harm minimisation approach to my service
<p><b>Measure</b></p> <p><i>How will I know that I have achieved this?</i></p>	I will use an evidence based approach in the way I respond to young people when they talk to me about their drug use	Management will be better informed of the issues my service faces	We will all know what the rules are at drop in.  We will all respond to behaviour in the same way	Young people will be able to identify ways that they can reduce risks in their alcohol or other drug use
<p><b>Strategy</b></p> <p><i>What steps will I take to achieve it?</i></p>	<p>a. Read more about Stages of Change and Motivational Interviewing</p> <p>b. Document how I have responded to particular conversations with clients</p> <p>c. Talk to my professional supervisor and reflect on what worked and what didn't</p>	<p>a. Ask other services what kind of template they use for reporting</p> <p>b. Ask my management what they need in a report</p> <p>c. Develop my own template</p>	<p>a. Discuss at the staff meeting</p> <p>b. Run a group with young people about what the rules should be</p> <p>c. Organise for everyone to go to training about managing behaviour</p>	<p>a. Order some AOD pamphlets and posters for the centre</p> <p>b. Talk to the local health service about running a workshop for drug action week</p> <p>c. Talk to young people about ways to reduce risks when AOD topics come up at drop in or during case work</p>
<p><b>Timeframe</b></p> <p><i>When will I achieve it?</i></p>	<p>a. Next 3 months</p> <p>b. Next 6 months</p> <p>c. Next 6 months</p>	<p>a. Next month</p> <p>b. Next 2 months</p> <p>c. Next 3 months</p>	<p>a. In 2 weeks</p> <p>b. Within 6 weeks.</p> <p>c. In the next 4 months</p>	<p>a. This week</p> <p>b. Start this week with event in 4 months</p> <p>c. Ongoing</p>

**Formalising a professional supervision relationship**

A written agreement or contract is used to clarify the roles, responsibilities and goals of supervision. See the template below:

# SUPERVISION CONTRACT

Name of supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of supervisee: \_\_\_\_\_

Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

***The supervision format we have agreed on is:***

Frequency of supervision: \_\_\_\_\_

Time allocated: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Arrangements for payment: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of documentation and records kept: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Limits of confidentiality: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Approach to supervision: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Our responsibilities**

**SUPERVISEE**

What I need from you is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What I am willing to contribute is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The things that I have responsibility for are: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**SUPERVISOR**

What I need from you is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What I am willing to contribute is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The things that I have responsibility for are: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## An example

### Our responsibilities

#### **SUPERVISEE**

What I need from you is:

- *constructive guidance about how I can improve at work*
- *independent feedback about issues I am facing*
- *support and encouragement about what I am doing well*

What I am willing to contribute is:

- *to be prepared for the supervision session*
- *to listen to feedback*

The things that I have responsibility for are:

- *to reflect on my work performance*
- *to set goals and take steps toward my goals*
- *identifying what is helpful and unhelpful about supervision*

#### **SUPERVISOR**

What I need from you is:

- *to be prepared for the supervision meeting by noting down issues you wish to discuss*
- *to reflect on your work practice and be open and honest about any difficulties you are facing*
- *to acknowledge your successes at work and steps you have made in reaching your goal*

What I am willing to contribute is:

- *to listen to your views and be non judgemental*
- *to provide feedback and guidance and help you explore possible solutions*
- *to encourage you in your progress and to acknowledge your successes*

The things that I have responsibility for are:

- *to do the things that I have agreed to do, ie. brought along information on a particular approach or theory*
- *to provide my full attention and support in supervision*
- *to maintain confidentiality of supervision proceedings, as per your agency supervision policy*

### **Other points to consider**

- Many services, including many rural services, are now finding it difficult to recruit skilled and experienced staff. By offering paid supervision as an above award working condition you may increase your chances of attracting and retaining more highly skilled workers.
- Your service should have a policy on Professional Supervision. We have included a model policy as an example.
- The requirement to participate in professional supervision should be included in job descriptions, work plans, job contracts or enterprise agreements.

- Your employer has a legal responsibility under Occupational Health & Safety legislation to ensure the safety and wellbeing of workers, including stress management. Professional supervision for workers is a key strategy in addressing this.

### **Other types of supervision**

**Peer support** can also be used as a form of supervision for services which do not have funding to pay for a professional supervisor, or for services that are located in smaller rural areas where it is difficult to find an appropriate supervisor.

Peer support can be defined as two workers with roughly the same amount or complimentary experience, skills or knowledge who meet to reflect on their work practice so that they can improve the way they help others. Both parties take on the role of supporting each other.

**Group supervision** is the same practice as peer support, but with more than two people. Each person in the team is responsible for supporting others.

Remember that peer support and group supervision are also about reflecting on and challenging current work practices so it is preferable that other participants are independent of your organization rather than co-workers who you have a friendship with.

**Team supervision** is a process more closely aligned to professional supervision but there is more than one supervisee, and the process occurs in a team setting. Team supervision has one independent person who provides professional supervision to everyone in the team. An advantage of team supervision is that team work issues can be addressed and that the team can work towards a common vision and practice.

Peer support, group supervision and team supervision should include clear agreements or contracts about the aim of supervision, roles and responsibilities, confidentiality, equal time for each participant, and the way feedback is to be provided.

# Model policy on Professional Supervision

## **Purpose of professional supervision**

The aim of supervision is to improve service delivery to clients and to provide support for the worker.

This is achieved by

- encouragement and acknowledgment of the achievements of the worker
- reflection and discussion of strategies for achieving and improving work
- discussion of evidence based best practice approaches
- discussion of strategies for improving team issues and the workplace environment
- reflection on how the worker is feeling and coping with workplace demands, including team and task issues
- reflection and planning for professional development

## **Professional supervision is for all staff**

All permanent staff are required to participate in professional supervision on a monthly basis.

Professional supervision is separate and in addition to the staff supervision sessions held between staff and their manager. (This should be documented in a separate policy)

## **Participating in supervision**

Time taken to participate in supervision, including travel time will be considered paid work. Usually this will be 2 hours per month. Additional time may be negotiated with the manager.

Supervision dates will be set in advance and adequate notice will be given of meetings. Staff are required to prioritise supervision above other meetings and arrange appointments at suitable times.

Supervision will be held off site in a location where confidential issues can be discussed privately.

Supervision meetings will start on time and be uninterrupted.

## **Persons suitable to provide supervision**

Staff may negotiate with their manager as to the most appropriate person to provide the professional supervision. Factors which will be taken into consideration include the supervisee learning style and learning goals and the type of supervision approach that the supervisee finds helpful. In some cases the supervisee may prefer a supervisor from the same cultural background, eg Aboriginal workers.

However the supervisor should

- Have suitable experience or training in providing professional supervision
- Have an appropriate theoretical approach to providing supervision
- Keep up to date with the required skill and knowledge
- Have a professional relationship and boundaries with the supervisee (ie. not a personal friend)
- Be an independent person outside of the organization
- Be willing to abide by this supervision policy and sign a supervision contract

The Supervisor should have the following key skills and attributes

- Knowledge of evidence based best practice in the area that the supervisee wishes to learn more about
- Ability to engage and develop rapport
- Communication skills, especially listening skills
- Non judgemental
- Unconditional positive regard
- Ability to encourage the supervisee to reflect and explore issues

A person who is being considered as a professional supervisor should provide a copy of their resume and a short statement of their approach to supervision prior to approval by the employer.

Payment of \$XX will be provided to supervisors for each supervision sessions provided.

### **Limits to confidentiality**

All issues discussed in supervision are strictly confidential. However there are some legal and professional requirements, such as mandatory reporting, which override a supervisee's right to confidentiality.

The professional supervisor may report unresolved situations which involve serious behaviour which are

- unethical, using the NSW Youth Work Code of Ethics as a guide
- placing the worker or a client at imminent risk

to the management committee.

The professional supervisor may also be required by some legislation to report some matters to government agencies such as the police, DOCS or the Commission for Children & Young People.

Aside from these concerns, the normal proceedings of supervision will not be reported to the management committee. The management may request confirmation that a supervisee has attended sessions and that a supervision contract has been developed.

### **Recording of supervision**

Generally only brief notes will be kept of supervision sessions. These will particularly relate to action items or agreements.

Care should be taken when recording or forwarding supervision information via email as this information could be accessed by others or be picked up by a virus and forwarded to other recipients. In particular, nothing which could identify a client should be emailed.

### **Process of supervision**

Supervision should be targeted to the needs of the supervisee and what helps them to improve their work practice. This could include the discussion of theoretical frameworks that inform practice, an exploration of feelings and work experiences, role playing appropriate intervention and counselling techniques, discussion of work scenarios and possible responses, motivational interviewing, solution focused therapy etc.

Exploration of personal issues (ie. family issues or drug use) should be referred to an outside agency such as a counselling service, psychologist or Employee Assistance Program.

### **Evaluation of supervision**

The supervisee and supervisor should ensure that regular review and evaluation of supervision sessions is conducted.

If either party feels that the sessions are no longer helpful (ie. perhaps the worker has improved in a particular area and now wants to focus on an area that the supervisor does not have expertise in) then the supervisee may seek an alternate supervisor.

The manager should also regularly check with the staff member via staff supervision sessions and the annual staff appraisal system that supervision is a productive and helpful activity.