

# Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service Supervision Toolkit

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## Introduction and Aims of this Toolkit

This Toolkit is intended to support leaders, managers and childminders who are working with assistants to undertake effective supervision of the staff they line manage.

The toolkit includes information about supervision and why it is important, useful approaches which could be adopted and templates which can be adapted for use in a variety of settings.

## What is Supervision?

**Supervision is a confidential, regular, two-way process** that takes place between a named supervisor and supervisee, planned at a time and date that is suitable for both parties, and agreed in advance.

Supervision enables supervisors and supervisees to examine and reflect on the quality of their practice. It encourages accountability and promotes open dialogue, empowering professional effectiveness.

Supervision acts as a means for ensuring that members of staff all have access to the support, training and development they require for their professional and personal growth. This, in turn, should impact positively on outcomes for children.

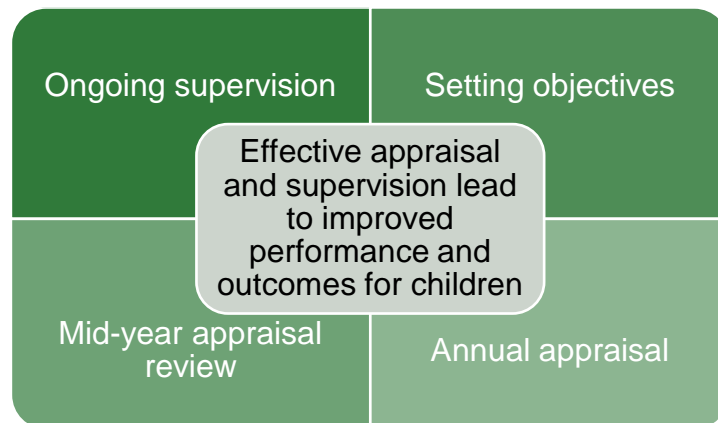
Supervision should be a positive experience for all and must be offered to all staff who work with early years children.

It is important to acknowledge that supervision is not the same as appraisal - Supervision is an ongoing process that includes regular and frequent meetings

between supervisors and supervisees to discuss both personal and work aspects and provide development and support. Appraisal, on the other hand, is a formal process to assess the performance of an employee over a particular period of time.

For further information on appraisal visit the professional resources page:

[Onboarding and retention of staff](#)



## Context

Good supervision - in giving staff an opportunity to reflect on their practice, explore any worries or concerns and discuss possible solutions and ways forward - contributes towards developing confident and competent staff groups. This is highlighted as being important in establishing safe organisations where children are safeguarded from harm. Findings from Safeguarding Practice Reviews repeatedly emphasise the importance of professional supervision for those working with children and their families.

### **Supervision is a legal requirement.**

The [Statutory Framework for the early years foundation stage, Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five](#), states that:

“Providers/childminders must put appropriate arrangements in place for the supervision of staff/assistants who have contact with children and families. Effective supervision provides support, coaching, and training for the practitioner and promotes the interests of children. Supervision should foster a culture of mutual support, teamwork, and continuous improvement, which encourages the confidential discussion of sensitive issues.

Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:

- Discuss any issues – particularly concerning children’s development or wellbeing, including child protection concerns.
- Identify solutions to address issues as they arise.
- Receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness.”

Group and school-based providers and childminders who are working with an assistant(s) need to be aware that, during inspection, inspectors will gather evidence of the effectiveness of staff supervision, performance management, training and continuing professional development, and the impact of these on children's well-being, learning and development.

[Early Years Inspection Handbook for Ofsted Registered Provision](#)

## **Benefits of supervision**

### **Supervision supports practitioners by:**

- ensuring they are clear and confident about their role and responsibilities
- reflecting on their practice
- celebrating their strengths and achievements
- agreeing on goals and next steps to support future development
- offering time to focus on possible solutions
- promoting health and well-being
- valuing their voice through open and constructive dialogue
- nurturing trust, confidence and capability
- offering timely and effective support, advice and training

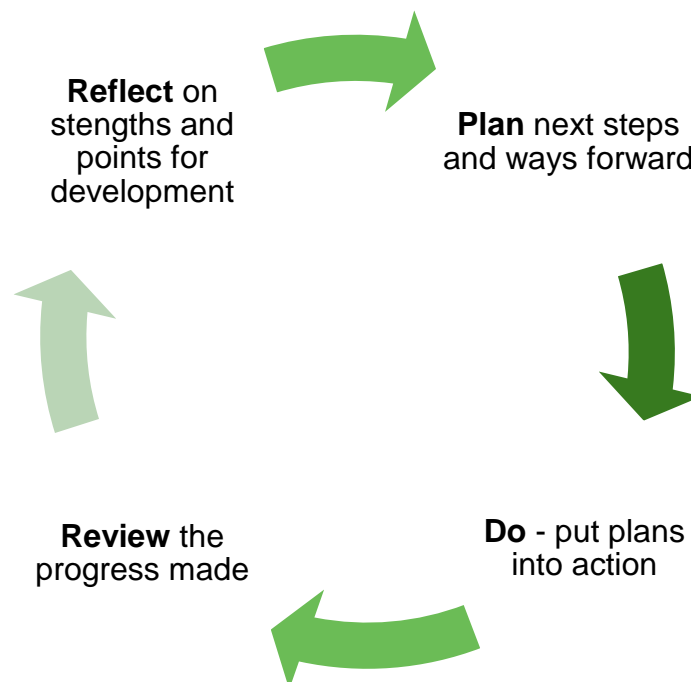
### **Supervision supports the provision by:**

- enabling the sharing of the setting's ethos and vision and further developing staff's understanding of this and how they can contribute
- ensuring staff have a manageable workload and are motivated and productive
- promoting continuous improvement and a commitment to best practices
- providing high quality, inclusive care and education for children and their families
- ensuring the highest possible standards of safeguarding for both children and staff
- ensuring staff meet the setting's standards and expectations
- ensuring staff understand and implement the settings' policies and procedures
- fostering clear communication within the setting
- supporting staff retention by creating a positive culture and supportive working environment
- offering an opportunity to regularly assess staff/volunteers' suitability to work with young children and to review any changes regarding the Health Declaration and DBS check

## Key aspects of supervision

### Supervision should provide opportunities to:

1. provide a regular 'safe space' for staff/assistants/volunteers to reflect upon their work with children, families and other team members – this includes how their work impacts on them personally – e.g. their workload, their health including their mental health and wellbeing.
2. discuss any concerns about specific children's learning and development, welfare and/or safety.
3. identify and acknowledge the individual's strengths, interests, worries and to discuss possible solutions and next steps.
4. provide targeted support, coaching and training to enable personal and professional growth and development.
5. challenge and be challenged.
6. review actions from previous supervisions, creating a cycle of personal development through a 'reflect, plan, do, review' approach.



## Best Practice in the supervision process

### Frequency

The Statutory Framework for the EYFS does not specify how often supervision should take place or how long it should last. Therefore, the frequency of supervisions can be decided by the provider to meet the needs of their provision – e.g. monthly, bi-monthly, half termly, termly.

Occasionally, the frequency of supervisions may increase, for example, if a member of staff/assistant is new to the sector, has a personal change of circumstance or if they are dealing with a challenging work situation.

### Recording

It is good practice to have a carefully considered, standardised agenda for supervisions, alongside a supervision agreement and policy which should be reviewed regularly. These can help to clarify roles, responsibilities and expectations and empowers both parties by offering a shared understanding of how they can work effectively together.

Supervision meetings should be recorded, including any agreed actions, and should be stored securely and confidentially.

Recording helps to keep track of discussions and supports with the monitoring and reviewing of actions, especially ongoing actions in need of regular reflection and review. It is also a good method to capture:

- wellbeing, emotional support and development
- workload demands and time management
- role in line with EYFS requirements
- work with individual children including vulnerable groups
- safeguarding conversations
- equality and diversity aspects

Here are some ideas for possible ways to structure and record supervisions:

[Supervision record template](#)

[Model individual supervision agreement template](#)

### Confidentiality

Confidentiality is crucial in supervision because it helps create a safe and respectful space for staff to share their experiences, concerns, and worries, and to receive feedback, advice, and encouragement from their supervisors. However, all parties need to be aware that there may be occasions when difficult issues arise which will need to be shared/discussed elsewhere. It is important to be transparent about when and why this will be necessary and how it will be done.

### **Difficult Conversations in Supervision**

Supervisors are responsible for facilitating open, honest and solution-focused dialogue during supervisions and may face a range of challenges when the need for “difficult” conversations arise, including the need to manage conflict, maintain relationships and support wellbeing. When having conversations that can take a negative focus, it is important also to acknowledge areas of strength and positivity. These conversations can be challenging to get right - see [Section 8 – Supervision: A space and place for difficult conversations](#) of the SSSC’s Supervision Learning Resource for further ideas and guidance.

### **Role of the leader/manager – an advocate for supervision**

The leader/manager will typically line manage just a proportion of the staff in the setting but, through the process, should have oversight of the whole setting and workforce. The leader/manager should lead by example, demonstrating the value of supervision by making a time commitment to have their own and scheduling high quality supervisions for the staff they line manage, who will in turn then replicate the process for their staff.

Leaders/managers cannot provide the most effective support to their staff if they are not supported themselves - therefore leaders/managers must also receive regular supervisions.

Supervision for leaders/managers can be accessed through the [Stronger Practice hub](#) or arranged with owners, committee chairs, EYFS leads in school, peer to peer via a manager of another setting or other suitable personnel within your organisation.

### **Wellbeing and Emotional Support in supervision**

This is the most important part of supervision in the caring services and should be the first thing considered in the supervision meeting.

Staff can only fully support the children and their families, along with other colleagues if they are supported themselves. Time taken for discussions around personal matters in supervision can further enhance working relationships and result in an individual being able to meet the demands of the role and maintain a work/life balance, which ultimately benefits the children within their care. There are a number of support services available should additional support be needed – supervisors need to be sensitive and responsive and signpost/refer supervisees to relevant sources when necessary.

See [Early years practitioner wellbeing support - How to support mental health and wellbeing of you and your team in an early years setting](#) for more information.

## Possible Approaches to Supervision

### Positive Practice Tool – Signs of Safety – a useful approach to supervision

This method is called the [Positive Practice Tool](#) and is based on the *Signs of Safety* approach used by Leicestershire Social Care to support children and families in child protection cases.

#### What is the Positive Practice Tool and how does it work?

The basic model takes into account three areas

- What is working well?
- What concerns are there/what are we worried about?
- What needs to happen next?

#### How could you use this tool/approach in supervision of staff?

You could consider using this strengths-based tool to support the management of staff.

The approach can support conversations about what the supervisee does well (from yours and their perspective) or what is working well for the employee at the moment; what you/they are worried or concerned about and what you/they need to do next or put in place to address any concerns.

Working in this way can support collaboration and positive partnerships within the setting, encouraging all to be solution focused and to strive for the best possible outcomes for children.

### The GROW Model – a useful approach to supervision

The **GROW** Model is a coaching framework that involves four steps:

1. **Goal** – to set or agree on clear goals or outcomes.
2. **Reality** – to have a clear picture of the current situation.
3. **Options** – to explore all possible solutions.
4. **Will** (or Way Forward) – to set out next steps or actions.

It's a framework that can be applied in a variety of situations, including coaching, mentoring, and performance conversations such as supervision.

As a leader/manager, one of your most important roles is to coach your people to do their best. By doing this, you'll help them make better decisions, solve problems that are holding them back, learn new skills, and otherwise support their professional development.

## Possible Coaching Questions

### Goal

What is important to you right now?  
 What do you want to achieve?  
 When do you want to achieve it by?  
 What are your priorities?  
 What impact will it have for you to achieve this goal?



### Reality

Tell me what is happening at the moment  
 What have you tried so far?  
 What have you learned from these actions?  
 What is the biggest blocker and how do you get round it?  
 What resources do you have? Skill, time, enthusiasm, money, support etc?  
 What other resources will you need? Where might you get them from?

### Options

What can you do to change/move the situation forward?  
 What are ALL the different ways in which you could approach this?  
 Which of these solutions appeals to you the most, or feels best to you?  
 How can you apply where you are successful into the areas where you are less successful?  
 Who else do you know that has already achieved this?  
 What else could you bring from past successes?

### Will (or Way Forward)

Which option or options will you choose?  
 What support do you need - how and when might you get this support?  
 What are the first steps?  
 Who else could you involve?  
 When will you start?  
 On a scale of 1-10, rate your commitment to taking this agreed action.  
 What would move your commitment up by 2 points?

## Observation and Feedback as part of supervision

Observing staff in their day-to-day practice is a valuable tool for identifying the quality of care, interactions and teaching across the setting. It helps confirm strengths; validate what people are already aware of and highlight aspects of practice that need development. The information gathered can provide a focus for discussion at supervision meetings, encouraging practitioners to reflect on their own practice and jointly identify areas for further development with their supervisor. Leaders and managers can provide coaching and modelling to support staff to improve, in addition to providing continuing professional development opportunities.

See [\\*Challenging practice to further improve learning, playing and interacting](#) for further ideas and guidance on:

- Observation and interaction skills



- Interpersonal skills
- Communication skills
- Coaching skills
- Modelling good practice

*\*Although this document is now archived and may contain some dated information, the approaches, methods and processes described are still particularly relevant for early years leaders/managers.*

## Monitoring and Evaluating the Supervision Process

It is important that leaders and managers consider the supervision process in their setting and occasionally monitor and evaluate how effective it is. This is crucial for enhancing the quality of supervision, monitoring and evaluation processes.

It is good practice to put the staff at the centre of these conversations, value their contributions and use their thoughts/ideas/opinions to further develop the supervision process. How well do they feel they are being supported and supervised? They are likely to become more invested in the process if they are included in a “done with”, not “done to” approach. This can be managed individually in discussions with staff, or by asking them for written feedback; you may choose to anonymise this so staff give more honest feedback. Reflect on the findings from your reviews to inform further improvements to the supervision process.

Here are some example questions you could ask your staff (it’s even better if you come up with your own):

Do you have regular supervisions?

Generally, how often do they happen?

Do your supervisions follow a planned agenda?

Do you and your supervisor come prepared for the supervision?

Is there opportunity for you to raise aspects to discuss during supervisions?

Do you have chance to talk about your health, wellbeing and the personal aspects of your life as well as your job role?

Do you feel your ability to do your job has improved as a result of the supervision process?

Why do you think this is?

What aspects of supervision do you find the most useful?

How do you think your supervisions could be improved?

## Further information and resources for monitoring and evaluating supervision

Here are some useful ideas to further support your monitoring and evaluation:

Consider the **Ofsted grade descriptors** for leadership and management in the [Early Years Inspection Handbook](#) – effective supervision plays a crucial part in what is described.

Which elements do you feel are a strength?; Which elements needs improvement?;

How might you go about this?

You could also use previous sections of this toolkit as an audit.

### **Possible indicators of effective supervision:**

Consider using the indicators below to evaluate how well supervision is working in your setting (you could turn these into questions for your staff):

- Staff feel valued, listened to and empowered to challenge practice
- Staff are respectful to employees, children, parents, carers and other professionals
- Staff are open to change and the development of their practice
- Leaders model positive behaviour
- Staff are in tune with and knowledgeable about the children in their care
- Staff develop positive, trusting two-way relationships with parents who are welcomed into the provision and encouraged to be involved in their child's learning and development
- Children's voices are actively listened to through quality interactions and appropriate responses
- Staff demonstrate professional curiosity and always ensure children are advocated for and placed at the centre

### **How Supportive is our Supervision Process?**

Consider using the questions below to evaluate how supportive your supervision process is in your setting (you could turn these into questions for your staff):

- Do we create a safe environment within supervision where trust and confidentiality are nurtured and maintained?
- Do we assist in the supervisees personal and professional development through coaching approaches?
- Do we value and motivate staff and encourage them to openly share their thoughts, ideas, opinions in relation to their work role?
- Do we monitor the health and well-being of the supervisee, signposting to relevant sources of information and support, referring to occupational health or counselling for example when appropriate?
- Do we openly and sensitively discuss personal and/or work-related issues e.g. well-being, health and safety, safeguarding, learning and development?
- Do we empower staff by carefully considered and well-communicated delegation?

See the [Supervision Audit Tool – from Warwickshire County Council](#) for possible ways to structure, collate and record the monitoring and evaluation of the supervision process.