

## What is Practice Supervision?

All mediators, whether working singly or in large organisations, need a structured opportunity to reflect on their individual practice and to ensure their continued professional development. This should be distinguished from line management supervision which is primarily concerned with personal performance within a specific organizational context, although both forms of supervision can be, and frequently are combined.

Practice supervision is important for all occupations, and is particularly so for mediators as they have considerable autonomy, are often required to make on the spot decisions, and are frequently required to act in stressful and complex situations.

Practice supervision for mediators should seek to achieve the following:

1. A supportive environment where the mediator can openly discuss and reflect on issues of practice, personal issues arising from practice, and issues concerning their working environment and relationships.
2. A framework where the development of the mediator's personal and professional goals can be tracked and refined.
3. An opportunity to identify personal strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for learning.
4. An opportunity to benefit from the experience, insight and judgement of someone who is impartial and knowledgeable in the field.

## Who Should Supervise?

In practical terms supervisors must be able to offer supervision that is:

- > regular and uninterrupted;
- > private and confidential;
- > well managed;
- > accurately recorded.

In some contexts it is possible for line managers to provide practice supervision which focuses on the practice issues without hierarchical issues providing insurmountable barriers. In other contexts it may be preferable for the practice supervision to be carried out by someone else from within your organisation or someone entirely independent. In all cases, however, it is important for the supervisor to have the following:

- > Substantial knowledge and experience of mediation practice.
- > Familiarity with and training in good practice in supervision.
- > An ability to handle issues sensitively and confidentially while maintaining professional boundaries.

## Getting the Most out of Supervision

You will benefit most from supervision if you prepare for it. Note specific observations and incidents for discussion as they occur so that you have something to review before presenting them for discussion. A reflective diary is also a useful tool for mediators. It can be used to record incidents, note action taken/not taken, ethical issues and good practice issues that arise between sessions and any personal and/or practical concerns. Case records and feedback received from clients and co-workers are useful prompts to discuss workload, case management, co-working and recent challenges and successes.

You should also be aware of the attitudes and expectations you bring to supervision. Your experience of giving and receiving positive and negative feedback influences your expectations and commitment to supervision. Good supervision, like good mediation, respects values, involves and empowers the individual, promotes self-awareness and encourages individuals to be proactive in planning required outcomes.

## Supervision Agreements

It is important that there is a common understanding and agreement about the purpose and process of practice supervision. The following is an example of a simple contract between a mediator and supervisor.

### Sample Support and Supervision (S&S) Agreement

#### **Purpose: Supervision will be used to**

- > share information and reflect on current practice;
- > recognise and value current practice;
- > identify areas needing attention and agree action to address them;
- > provide support for the participant.

#### **Process: Supervision will be**

- > every 4- 6 weeks by arrangement;
- > for 1 – 1.5 hours;
- > notes will be taken by supervisor and mediator in turn, their accuracy will be agreed, the notes signed and copies retained by the mediator and the supervisor;
- > the agenda will include workload, current cases, co-working, training and any other items agreed as appropriate before supervision begins;
- > matters of confidentiality will be discussed as they arise;
- > supervision process will be reviewed every six months.

#### **Commitment**

- > both agree to come to S&S prepared and ready to listen;
- > both agree to voice our opinions, feelings and concerns;
- > both agree to prioritise and value S&S.

## Other Sources of Support

Supervision is only one source of practice support and learning. Other opportunities for practice and personal support are provided through training, shadowing, mentoring, coaching, participation in conferences, workshops and seminars, study time, case reviews, and group discussion sessions.

**Sources:** Supervision In The Helping Professions by Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet ISBN 0-335-09833

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Sacro, 17 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh EH1 3NX

**tel:** 0131 624 7263

**email:** [info@scmc.org.uk](mailto:info@scmc.org.uk)

**web:** [www.scmc.sacro.org.uk](http://www.scmc.sacro.org.uk)

**sacro**