

Guidelines on supervision

1. Introduction

1.1. Supervisees are in the unusual position of being both a recipient of a psychological service and the provider of a psychological service. The *Code of Ethics* (2002) (The *Code*) defines a client as *a direct recipient of psychological services ... The term may subsume patients, students, research participants, supervisees, other direct recipients, other professionals, referral agencies or organisations*. Psychologists rely upon access to the combined expertise within their profession to ensure that they deliver the highest quality services to their clients and to the community. One means of conveying this expertise is through supervision in a range of contexts. These contexts include supervision as a pathway to State/Territory registration, as part of the fieldwork contained within an accredited coursework postgraduate degree, as a research student, as a means to gain APS College Membership, and in the context of continuing professional development. Several ethical considerations are common to all supervisory contexts and some are more specifically related to each context. These Guidelines have been developed primarily to address supervision of psychological practice, rather than psychological research.

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, Section D 'Supervision and Training':

D1: Members who supervise the work of students or junior colleagues have a responsibility to promote awareness of and adherence to the provisions of this Code.

D2: It is unethical for members who are providing supervision or training to require or coerce supervisees or trainees to disclose personal information either directly or in the context of any training procedure. Where self disclosure is a normal expectation of a given training procedure, informed consent must be obtained from participants prior to training.

D3: Members must not engage their supervisees, or junior colleagues for whom they have administrative responsibility, in psychotherapy or any similar procedure except with the informed consent of the supervisee when such consent is given for the specific purpose of training in that procedure.

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, General Principle III 'Propriety':

The welfare of clients and the public, and the integrity of the profession, shall take precedence over a member's self interest and over the interests of the member's employer and colleagues.

1.2. These Guidelines have been compiled to act as a more specific supplement to Section D of the *Code of Ethics*, 'Supervision and Training'. This document addresses key issues to be covered prior to the commencement of supervision arrangements, and then focuses on the considerations of the different roles involved within the process of supervision. These Guidelines are designed to enhance the process of supervision and to assist supervisors and supervisees to develop a rewarding supervisory relationship.

1.3. This document is regularly revised and is designed to aid and remind practising members of the necessity to update their knowledge and skills with respect to a number of ethical issues. Since many members have undertaken ongoing supervision themselves, and many also become supervisors, these Guidelines are designed to promote awareness of, and amplify, the current *Code of Ethics*.

1.4. These Guidelines may be used by members except in the event where the Guidelines are not consistent with the legal requirements of Psychologists Registration Boards, in which case the legal requirements would take precedence.

2. Code of Ethics/Ethical Guidelines

2.1. Although the whole of the *Code of Ethics* is essential reading for supervisors and supervisees, particular reference is made to Section D 'Supervision and Training', Section B 'Relationships with Clients', Section A 'Psychological Assessment Procedures', and Section E 'Research'.

2.2. Similarly, all Ethical Guidelines are important, but attention is drawn to:

- *Guidelines for managing professional boundaries and multiple relationships;*

- *Guidelines relating to suicidal clients;*
- *Guidelines on the proscription of sexual relationships with clients;*
- *Guidelines on reporting child abuse and neglect, and criminal activity;*
- *Guidelines on confidentiality (including when working with minors); and*
- *Guidelines regarding financial dealings and fair trading.*

3. Supervisory contexts

3.1. The supervised psychological practice pathway to registration generally requires 100 hours of supervision over a minimum of two years of full-time psychological practice (or equivalent part-time) after the completion of an accredited four-year sequence in psychology from a university. Variations exist across State and Territory Psychologists Registration Boards, and supervisors and supervisees are required to be aware of, and act in accordance with, their particular State or Territory Registration Board requirements. These Guidelines are not intended to replace existing Supervision Guidelines published by each Registration Board in Australia, which detail the particular requirements needed to gain registration as a psychologist. These Guidelines address ethical issues that are predominantly concerned with the process of supervision, and are intended to be used as a complement to Registration Board Guidelines.

3.2. Accredited postgraduate professional Masters and Doctorate courses have multiple placements as part of their course requirements. Both the field supervisor and the university placement supervisor play integral roles in the success of such placements. These Guidelines are to be read in conjunction with any existing university policy document on placement supervision.

3.3. The Guidelines are to be read in conjunction with any existing Supervision Guidelines for the specialist Colleges.

3.4. The Guidelines are to be read in conjunction with any existing university policy on research supervision. See also *Code of Ethics*, Section E 'Research'.

4. Responsibilities to clients

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, General Principle III(d):

Members must be mindful of the legal context in which they work, their obligations towards clients and employers, and their duties towards clients.

4.1. When members who are probationary (conditionally) registered psychologists deliver psychological services, it is essential that they identify themselves to clients as a psychologist-in-training, so that there is no misunderstanding by the client. Depending on the work context, part of this explanation may include informing the client to whom their personal information may be disclosed – refer to the National Privacy Principles within the Private Sector Provisions of the Federal Privacy Act (1988), the Victorian Health Records Act (2001) and the New South Wales Health Records and Information Privacy Act (2002). Supporting documentation can be found in the Member Resources section of the APS website, www.psychology.org.au.

4.2. Where members intend to seek supervision regarding their work with clients, they are encouraged to inform clients about the process and obtain their consent. Refer to National Privacy Principle 2, 'Use and Disclosure', from the Privacy Act (1988), and relevant State Health Records legislation.

5. Important issues prior to supervision

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*:

General Principle I(a): *Members are expected to be cognisant of the reasonably foreseeable consequences of their actions and to endeavour to ensure that their services are used appropriately.*

General Principle II(b): *Members must refrain from offering advice or undertaking work beyond their professional competence.*

5.1. Prior to the commencement of any supervision arrangement, it is essential for each of the parties involved to be clear about the intended purposes of the supervision. For situations where the supervisee is proceeding towards full registration, both parties should familiarise themselves with the local Psychologists Registration Board's requirements of supervisees for registration. Similarly, members supervising students on placement have the responsibility to ensure that they are sufficiently available to provide an effective supervision arrangement according to the agreed supervision contract (especially in situations where there is more than one student).

5.2. Supervisors need to inform supervisees of any particular ethical or legal issues that are likely to be relevant to the supervision context (e.g. conflict of interest, defining the client). The more that supervisors can be proactive and mindful about these issues, the better informed the supervisee will be.

5.3. When members provide supervision, they must be competent to do so. This requirement includes having content knowledge for the type of supervision being sought and skills related to the process of supervision. There may be occasions where a supervisee requires specific skills such as administering and interpreting psychological tests. It is not uncommon for a supervisee to develop these skills in a series of supervision sessions with a secondary supervisor.

6. Preliminary ethical considerations: Establishing the contract

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, Section B 'Relationships with Clients':

B7: Members must avoid dual relationships that could impair their professional judgement or increase the risk of exploitation. Examples of such dual relationships include, but are not limited to, provision of psychological services to employees, students, supervisees, close friends or relatives.

6.1. The process of selecting a supervisor or supervisee should be done carefully, paying close attention to any potential dual relationships. In establishing a supervisory arrangement, both supervisor and supervisee should be watchful for the impact of possible dual relationships between them in social and other contexts.

6.2. An effective supervision arrangement requires the clear delineation, preferably from the outset, of responsibilities for all the parties involved, which might include the supervisor, supervisee, employer, placement agency, university, local Psychologists Registration Board or APS College. It is advisable to establish a clear understanding of who is responsible for what aspects of the arrangement, and of each party's expectations, all of which can be contained within a supervision contract.

6.3. Ideally, a supervision contract should be constructed through a collaborative process between the supervisee and supervisor. Whatever the type of supervision arrangement established, it should contain a built-in system of review, so that issues can be addressed as they arise, rather than at or after the completion of a placement or supervision contract. Thus, the supervision contract should be a document that may be either reviewed on a regular basis or revised to reflect the changes that occur over time.

6.4. It is often helpful, and sometimes required, for a supervisee to have more than one supervisor in professional practice settings, or in research settings.

7. Supervisors' ethical considerations

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*:

General Principle I 'Responsibility': *Members remain personally responsible for the professional decisions they make.*

General Principle II(b) 'Competence': *Members must refrain from offering advice or undertaking work beyond their professional competence.*

Refer to the *Code*, Section D 'Supervision and Training' (see section 1.1 of these Guidelines).

7.1. Supervisors should be competent in the areas in which they are providing supervision. In the context of university placement supervision, supervisors should be familiar with and adhere to APS Accreditation Guidelines.

7.2. Supervisors should consider explaining to the supervisee the process of supervision and the many factors involved that supervisees may not be aware of. For example, there is likely to be a power differential in supervision, just as there is in the psychologist-client relationship, which may influence the process. It is possible to reduce its influence, but the power differential should not be ignored.

7.3. Supervisors can assist their supervisees by explaining the model of supervision or type of theories they will follow, and how they propose to give feedback. Supervisors can inform supervisees that they may also take a different approach to the supervision process depending on the supervisee's level of development. Appropriate and constructive methods of interaction, dialogue and feedback should be agreed upon to facilitate the supervision process.

7.4. It is beneficial to explain to the supervisee the difference between therapy and supervision, and to indicate what external options are available for supervisees should personal issues affect their psychological work.

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*:

General Principle I(b): *Members shall have ultimate regard for the highest standards of their profession.*

7.5. Supervisors involved in supervising trainees for registration as a psychologist will ultimately need to make a judgement about the competence of their supervisee. They will need to decide whether the supervision requirements for registration have been met, whether their supervisee is ready to practise unsupervised, and whether they believe this person is sufficiently prepared to enter the profession as a colleague. Similar judgement decisions will need to be made by field supervisors with respect to a student passing their placement, and APS College Members about the competence and suitability of their supervisee to become a College Member.

7.6. Supervisors should consider alerting supervisees to the difficulties supervisors may face in their dual roles of 'mentor' and 'evaluator'. As supervision progresses, responsibility for monitoring the performance of the supervisee lies with the supervisor. Supervisors should raise any queries of competence as they arise, and not wait until the end of the supervision period to discuss them.

7.7. Depending on the supervision context, it is also important to be clear with the supervisee about the distinctions between requirements for and responsibilities for field supervision, administrative requests, and professional development.

7.8. At a practical level, supervisors need to inform their supervisees of the times when they are available, and how they can be contacted in an emergency, or any alternative arrangement for support. For postgraduate students on placement, who effectively have two supervisors (field supervisor and university placement supervisor) it is important to clarify where each supervisor's responsibilities and the supervisee's accountabilities lie.

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, Section B 'Relationships with Clients':

B14: Members must make advance financial arrangements that safeguard the best interests of and are clearly understood by clients.

Refer to the *Guidelines regarding financial dealings and fair trading*.

7.9. Where the supervisee is paying for supervision sessions, the financial arrangements shall be established prior to the commencement of the supervision process and be clearly understood by both parties, preferably by written contract. The supervision arrangement shall not exploit the power differential that exists between supervisor and supervisee.

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, Section H 'Members' relationships with other professionals':

H3: Members must not solicit business from any client in a similar existing relationship with another professional in pursuit of individual gain.

H4: If a member is approached by a person who is already receiving similar services from another professional, the member must carefully consider all the implications of becoming involved and must discuss these with the prospective client. The welfare of the client must be paramount in these considerations and the member must proceed with caution and sensitivity towards all parties concerned.

H5: Should a member have cause to disagree with a colleague in psychology or another profession on professional issues, the member must, nevertheless, refrain from making intemperate criticism in a manner which casts doubt on that colleague's professional competence.

7.10. In situations where a supervisor may be employed by a rival company to that of the supervisee, it is important to clarify what will be done with "commercial-in-confidence" information. Particularly in organisational psychology settings, the supervisor and supervisee may be working or attempting to work with the same company client. Potential conflicts of interest should be identified, considered and appropriately resolved either at the initial stages of supervision, or at the earliest stage when they become apparent. In some circumstances a decision may need to be made about whether the supervision arrangement can continue.

8. Supervisees' ethical considerations

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*:

General Principle III(d): *Members must be mindful of the legal context in which they work, their obligations towards clients and employers, and their duties towards clients.*

General Principle I(a): *Members are expected to be cognisant of the reasonably foreseeable consequences of their actions and to endeavour to ensure that their services are used appropriately.*

8.1. It is important that supervisees contribute fully to the process of establishing the supervision contract, so that it becomes a meaningful document for both parties, and that the expectations of supervisees are incorporated. Subsequently, both parties are expected to comply with the negotiated conditions of the supervision contract.

8.2. It is up to supervisees to take responsibility for their own specific, operationalised goals of the supervision process. Rather than leaving the goal as a generic one, supervisees should be more detailed and specific about what they wish to achieve. For example, instead of "to become a better counsellor", a supervisee may state "to improve my micro-counselling skills".

8.3. As mentioned previously, the supervision contract should be a document that can be reviewed and refined over time, which means that supervisees' goals may need to change to reflect their differing developmental standing.

8.4. As the supervision process frequently involves an evaluative component, supervisees can benefit from establishing with their supervisors an acceptable method for obtaining feedback. Again, this approach may be amended over time as supervisees further develop their skills. If they foresee or become aware of problems, difficulties or deficiencies in their supervised service delivery, supervisees should at the earliest opportunity seek their supervisor's assistance and advice.

9. Employers' ethical considerations

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*:

General Principle I 'Responsibility': *Members remain personally responsible for the professional decisions they make.*

Refer to the *Guidelines for managing professional boundaries and multiple relationships*.

9.1. There is a responsibility on employers to provide genuine professional development opportunities for their employees that include allocating sufficient time and providing adequate resources for them to be able to complete professional development tasks. Supervision is one such opportunity.

9.2. When a staff member is newly appointed and receives supervision in the workplace, it is important to distinguish between line management and professional development supervision. Where the roles are undertaken by different people, the supervisor and the supervisee should clarify the lines of authority for the supervisee with the employer to reduce the chances of conflicting messages from the line manager and supervisor. In the situation where the same person is acting in the role of line manager and supervisor, the implications of the dual roles need to be considered, and the impact on the supervision process negotiated.

9.3. Where employers have agreed to pay an external supervisor to supervise their employee, it is vital for the supervisor and supervisee to clarify what will be done with the information generated with respect to 'commercial-in-confidence' matters, performance of the employee, and client confidentiality. That is, the supervisor and supervisee along with the employer have a responsibility to establish with the involved parties who has access to what information, and how that information will be used.

10. Agencies' ethical considerations

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, Section B 'Relationships with Clients':

B3: Members must make provisions for maintaining confidentiality in the access, storage and disposal of records, subject to the legal requirements of their employment conditions.

10.1. There may be some overlap between the considerations for agencies and employers. Agencies play a key role in the establishment of an effective supervision arrangement, which will occur mainly for students on a placement as part of their postgraduate studies. Because students on placement are acting in the capacity of an employee, agencies should consider conducting an appropriate induction process, as they would with any new employee. Specific topics that should be covered include how to deal with emergency situations, and agency expectations around issues such as record keeping, working hours and attire.

10.2. Regarding working with clients, supervisees should be informed about the agency's standard approach for students on placement. For example, there may be a gradually developing sequence such as i) sit in and observe supervisor, ii) sit in then add comments, iii) run session in company of supervisor, iv) run session alone. There may be other approaches adopted, which would also reflect the different stage of development of the student (that is, first, second, or third placement).

11. University placement supervisors' ethical considerations

11.1. This section may also apply to placement supervisors in organisations that conduct training programs.

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*:

General Principle I(b): *Members shall have ultimate regard for the highest standards of their profession.*

General Principle III(a): *Members must respect the confidentiality of information obtained from clients in the course of their professional work. They may reveal such information to others only with the consent of the person or the person's legal representative. However in those unusual circumstances where failure to disclose may result in clear risk to the client or to others, the member may disclose minimal information necessary to avert risk. Members must inform their clients of the legal and other limits of confidentiality.*

Refer to the *Code of Ethics*, Section D 'Supervision and Training':

D1: Members who supervise the work of students or junior colleagues have a responsibility to promote awareness of and adherence to the provisions of this Code.

11.2. Universities will be involved in the supervision of students on placements as part of their postgraduate studies. The methods taken to organise placements may vary from university to university, but it is important for university placement supervisors to have regular ongoing contact with field supervisors, so that any issues arising that could affect a placement can be addressed quickly. University's expectations of agencies' responsibilities should be discussed and clarified.

11.3. The placement supervisor, particularly with first placements, should support the student in arranging and compiling a supervision contract, and develop appropriate support, supervision and consultation arrangements such as at least one on-site visit for each long-term placement. Part of the support offered to students by the placement supervisor would include being available to discuss a student's concern about a placement, and assist in any resolution processes required.

11.4. It is important that the placement supervisor manages the boundaries between agency policy and university procedure. This may relate to the question of whether and how to discuss placement clients in the university context. In effect, the placement supervisor helps to create 'safety nets' for students, which will provide protection as they go through the process of developing their skills and knowledge.

12. Ethical considerations in research supervision

12.1. The Guidelines are to be read in conjunction with any existing university policy on 'research supervision'. See also *Code of Ethics*, Section E.

12.2. In the research setting, it is essential that the supervisor ensures that both he/she and the supervisee are fully cognisant of the relevant sections of the Code of Ethics, that appropriate boundaries are maintained, that feedback is provided at reasonable intervals, and that any concerns with respect to ethical practice are identified, considered and appropriately resolved either at the initial stages of supervision, or at the earliest stage when they become apparent.

12.3. In research settings where a supervisee has more than one supervisor, potential theoretical or philosophical conflicts should be identified, considered and appropriately resolved either at the initial stages of supervision, or at the earliest stage when they become apparent. Supervisors have a responsibility to demonstrate respect for their colleagues' views.

13. Summary

13.1. These Guidelines have focused primarily on ethical issues facing supervisors and supervisees when involved in a supervision arrangement. Where appropriate, the document should be read in conjunction with the supervision guidelines that are issued by the local State or Territory Psychologists Registration Board.

13.2. These Guidelines may be used by members except in the event where the Guidelines are not consistent with the legal requirements of Psychologists Registration Boards in which case the legal requirements would take precedence.

References

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Further reading

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