

SUPERVISORY GUIDE
**Creating a Trauma-Informed
and Disability Inclusive Workplace**
PART 3: SUPERVISION

Created by MASS Collaboration:
Movement for Access, Safety, and Survivors



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Design by Jennifer Strickland, <https://ux-ui.org>

To request this manual in alternate formats, contact disability@barcc.org.

About the MASS Collaboration (Movement for Access, Safety and Survivors)

The MASS Collaboration is a collaboration between:

- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
- Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL)
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
- MBTA Transit Police

The goal of our collaboration is to create lasting systemic change within and between our organizations. Our improvements will help survivors/victims of sexual violence with disabilities in the Boston area receive accessible, safe and empowering responses and services that promote healing and justice, as they define it for themselves.

We are committed to understanding the barriers that survivors/victims with disabilities experience. We are also committed to building on our existing strengths to address gaps and improve our responses and services.

Vision Statement

The MASS Collaboration envisions Boston as a city in which the culture within and between victim services, criminal justice, transportation, and disability advocacy and service systems promote the healing, empowerment, and safety of people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence. Survivors/victims with disabilities will receive equal, responsive, safe, barrier-free services from compassionate professionals, staff, and volunteers who are knowledgeable about and comfortable with supporting survivors/victims with disabilities.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to change the culture within and between all collaborating organizations to enhance services to promote healing, empowerment and safety for people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence.

We will accomplish this by incorporating the voices of survivors/victims with disabilities to:

- Build formal and informal connections between our organizations;
- Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of professionals, staff, and volunteers;
- Enhance and develop policies and protocols based on best practices and current research about serving survivors/victims with disabilities to increase access to safe, responsive services.

Intro to this Guidance Document

Our collaboration has been working since 2011 to make changes in our organizations to improve response and services for survivors with disabilities. As we've explored how to create sustainable change within our organizations, we've identified that supervisors play a critical role in ongoing support of staff who may be working with survivors with disabilities. Additionally, we talked about the importance of inclusion of survivors with disabilities in this work, including as staff at our agencies.

BARCC and BCIL discussed how rape crisis centers and independent living centers can create workplaces that are welcoming to staff who identify as survivors with disabilities and also who work with survivors with disabilities. Some of the major themes raised by BARCC and BCIL in the needs assessment and throughout the course of our work include:

- Support with the emotional impact of work including vicarious trauma
- Staff safety and assistance with navigating boundaries
- Support with problem-solving with client/consumer work
- Inclusion of employees with disabilities in victim-services

We also identified that creating a workplace that is inclusive of survivors with disabilities results in a workplace that is more inclusive of all staff who bring with them different learning, communication, and work styles. This guidance document on Creating a Trauma-Informed and Disability-Inclusive Workplace was written from those discussions.

This document includes 4 manuals:

- Part 1: Hiring
- Part 2: On-boarding
- Part 3: Supervision
- Part 4: Boundaries and Safety

The goal of this guidance document is to provide information for how agencies, and in particular executive leadership, human resources and supervisors can create a disability-inclusive and trauma-informed workplace. It is best used along with in-person, interactive training to allow executive leadership, human resources, and supervisors the opportunity to practice skills and discuss challenges and ideas with each other. In addition, information in this guidance document can be useful for advocates assisting survivors with disabilities with employment issues.

***Please note that this document is not meant to provide legal guidance or advice.**

Part 3: Supervision

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Learning Objectives

By the end of this guidance and subsequent training, supervisors will be able to:

- Define and implement fundamental supervisory skills, such as reflective supervision skills and active listening
- Explore different supervisory styles
- Implement techniques for planning supervision meetings
- Explore how ableism and stigma against survivors of sexual violence can impact the workplace and also explore techniques for navigating these oppressions.
- Employ techniques for asking about and providing accommodations
- Recognize signs of vicarious trauma and provide options for balancing impacts of work
- Apply skills to create a trauma informed environment, such as open communication and normalizing vicarious trauma
- Employ skills in regard to balancing the needs of individual staff with needs of the organization

*Note that we use the word supervisor and supervisee in this manual to talk about the supervisory relationship. We recognize that most supervisors are also being supervisees.

Supervision Overview

Supervisors play an important role in supporting staff, including those who identify as survivors with disabilities, and in supporting staff who work with survivors with disabilities. While trainings can be helpful for learning about topics such as working with survivors with disabilities and vicarious trauma, they can't replace on-going support from supervisors.

Regularly scheduled supervision is an important part of having a trauma informed and disability-inclusive workplace because it allows a working relationship to be formed between supervisors and supervisees which is necessary for staff to feel safe and comfortable sharing what they need for accommodations and when they feel the impacts of vicarious trauma.

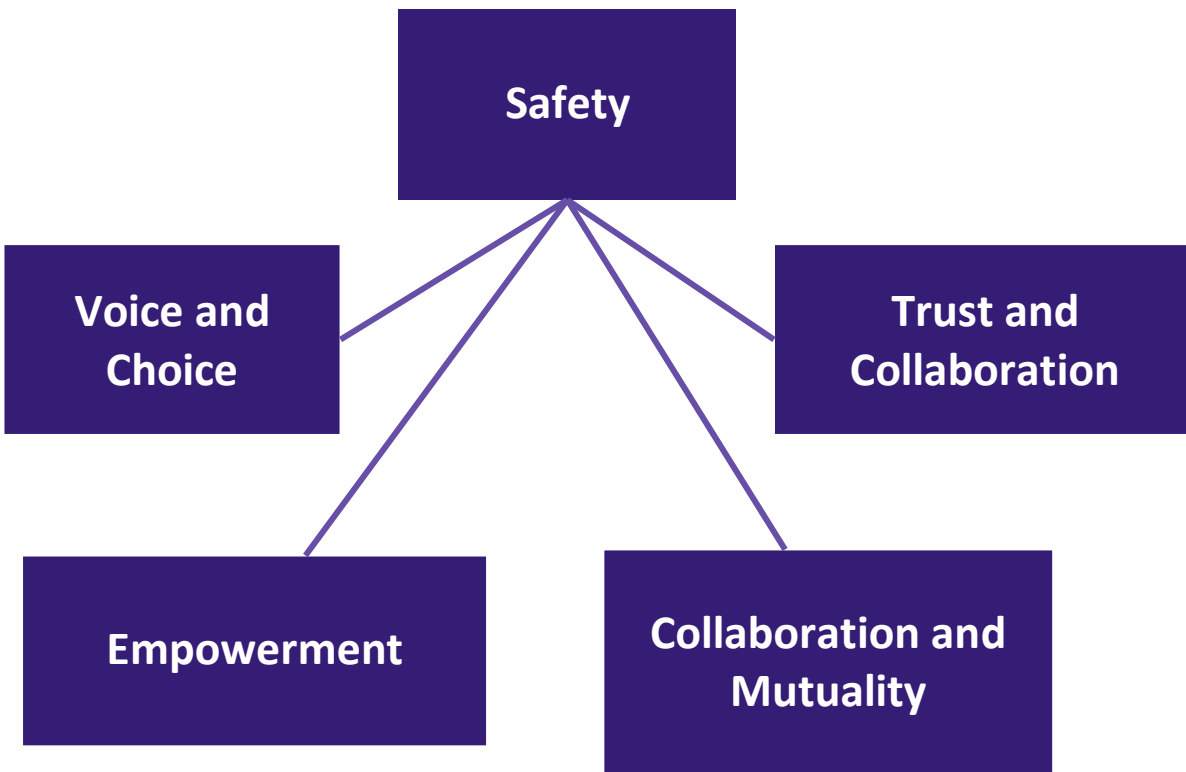
Purpose of supervision

The supervisor's role is to support individual staff to successfully do their job, so that the organization can successfully meet its mission. Supervisors support staff needs and also have the organization-wide perspective. Supervisors oversee staff performance by:

- Providing regular feedback on goals and formal performance evaluation;
- Providing direction, guidance, coaching and support; and
- Identifying opportunities for staff professional development.

Skilled supervisors give the supervisory relationship the time and attention it deserves. The supervisor must set a supportive tone, ensure that supervision occurs with expected frequency, and provide direct and respectful feedback with the best interests of both the organization and the supervisee.

What is trauma-informed and disability inclusive supervision



The work of Roger Fallon and Maxine Harris established guiding principles for trauma-informed care, which include safety; trust and transparency; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment; and voice and choice. We believe that these principles can be applied to trauma-informed supervision and are also true for being disability-inclusive.

In our discussions we identified many similarities between rape crisis and independent living philosophies and values.

1. Empowerment, voice, choice and collaboration.

Both independent living and rape crisis philosophies support the empowerment and voices of people with disabilities and survivors. Creating a workplace that is welcoming to survivors with disabilities means embodying these philosophies in our supervision of staff who may be survivors with disabilities.

- Empowerment means taking a strengths-based approach that values a wide range of abilities.
- Empowerment also means taking a collaborative approach where supervisors and supervisees work together and learn from each other.

2. Universal Design

Both independent living and rape crisis philosophies support universal design. Independent living centers focus on universal access with the idea that creating access for people with disabilities creates access for all people. Rape crisis centers focus on trauma-informed care as one that creates safety for survivors and that benefits everyone.

For many reasons, from a preference for privacy to concerns about being judged, both people with disabilities and survivors may hesitate to disclose to their workplace that they have needs related to disabilities or trauma that might impact their work. By taking a universal design and trauma-informed approach you create a workplace that as much as possible supports survivors with disabilities without need for disclosure. In addition, by directly communicating that you are open to providing accommodations, you open up channels for people to share what they might need to be able to successfully do their job.

3. Self-Care

Finally, self-care is important for people who are working with those in trauma, including those who have experienced sexual violence and those who've experienced oppression such as ableism. While it is common to talk about self-care as it relates to the impact of working with people in trauma, it is equally important to creating a workplace that is inclusive of people with disabilities. For all employees, including survivors with disabilities, self-care and an organization that supports self-care is important in allowing staff to be able to work at their best.

Providing trauma informed and disability inclusive supervision creates a welcoming workplace for survivors and people with disabilities and contributes to a healthy work environment for all staff. High quality supervision ultimately leads to improved services for consumers and clients because it supports the best work of staff, encourages staff to seek assistance with their work earlier, and increases retention of experienced staff.

This Manual

This manual will be divided into two sections. In the first section we will talk about the “How’s” or techniques to use in supervision. There are many techniques for supervision. We have chosen the following because they emphasize voice, choice, and collaboration which sets the tone for a trusting, empowering, and individualized supervisory relationship. This sets the foundation for all staff, including survivors with disabilities to share accommodation and vicarious trauma needs, as well as needs for support around working with survivors with disabilities.

- [Active listening](#)
- [Using supervisory styles](#)
- [Reflective supervision](#)

In the second section we will talk about the “What” of supervision and discuss application of the techniques to different areas of supervision. These areas include:

- [Beginning the supervisory relationship](#)
- [Planning supervision meetings](#)
- [Supporting staff with their work](#)
- [Professional development](#)
- [Supporting the emotional impact of work](#)
- [Balancing the needs of individual staff with needs of the organization](#)

There are many supervisory skills which are not discussed in this guidance document. We encourage supervisors to seek additional training and resources to continue to improve supervision skills. [We've included a few resources in the appendix on page 63.](#)

Section 1 - Techniques

Active Listening

Research suggests that supervisees perceive supervisors with strong listening skills as supportive and caring and that active listening is associated with fewer stress reactions from supervisees.

By using active listening skills, supervisors are also modeling these skills for staff to use in their work with consumer/clients, community partners, donors, and other stakeholders.

Active listening skills include:

- Turn off distractions. For example, avoid checking e-mail, picking up calls, or constantly checking the clock during supervision. In addition, try to stay focused instead of planning what you will say next or thinking about the next thing you need to do.

You might be someone who finds that fidgeting, doodling, etc., helps you to focus. If this is the case, let your supervisee know. “You’ll see me doodling in supervision. This doesn’t mean I’m not listening to you. It helps me to focus better on what you are saying.”

- Keep an open mind.
- Pay attention to non-verbal cues. These can include:
 - Tone of voice
 - Body language, such as arms being crossed or facial expressions

Keep in mind, however, that body language communicates different things for different people. For example, in some cultures eye contact is considered rude and in other cultures it is considered respectful. For someone on the autism spectrum, eye contact may be uncomfortable.

What is considered a respectful tone of voice may differ individual to individual depending on background, personality etc. Some people may be accustomed to a softer tone of voice, while others are accustomed to more of a blunt, direct affect or a more rambunctious tone of voice. In addition, for some people with disabilities, their tone of voice may be impacted by their disability.

Body language can be easily misinterpreted. Someone crossing their arms may not mean the person is being intentionally closed-off or passive; for example, someone could be cold, or it is their natural stance.

Don't make assumptions. If concerned about body language or tone of voice you're noticing, check-in to see if your interpretation is correct. In addition, notice what your own non-verbal cues may be communicating.

If picking up on non-verbal cues is hard for you, let your supervisee know and ask them to communicate directly with you.

- Show that you are listening. This can include occasionally nodding your head, saying "uh-huh," "yes," or other affirmations that feel comfortable and are accessible to you. Be sure that the method you use is accessible to your supervisee.
- Clarify: Ask for specific examples where necessary or if helpful for understanding. However, be aware that sometimes a clarifying question may make staff feel like they're being quizzed or doubted. It can help to start sentences with 'I' instead of 'you.' For example, "I'm not sure I understand. Can you explain what you mean by...?"
- Paraphrase: Briefly re-state what you think the speaker has said, as you understand it, to avoid miscommunication. Be open to being corrected. Examples include:
 - “What I'm hearing is...Is that correct?”
 - “It sounds like you are saying... Am I understanding you correctly?”
- Reflect. Reflect back your understanding of the feelings that supervisees are communicating. Examples include:
 - “It seems to bother you a lot that you are having a hard time finding accessible housing for the consumer you are working with.”
 - “It sounds like public speaking makes you anxious.”

- Affirming and Validating: Acknowledge the supervisee's feelings and challenges.

“Thank you for sharing that concern with me.”

- Summarize. Briefly sum up the major points that you talked about and check for agreement.

Adapting Supervision Styles

In this section we will share TSNE MissionWorks' (Formerly Third Sector New England) Effective Supervision training materials on supervisory styles.

Each of us naturally has our own leadership styles that we bring to supervision, but did you know that supervisory styles are also skills that can be learned? The following materials help to identify your supervisory style and provide tips for how to adapt your style to most effectively supervise staff. Different learning styles, ways of processing information, personalities and levels of experience can impact which supervisory style to use.

Supervisory Styles

Coaching

- Provide extensive and regular feedback throughout projects and assignments on both the process and product.
- Let staff know that you have confidence in their abilities.
- Praise your staff's good work (particularly important)

Facilitating

- Provide a sounding board as staff make decisions about how to do their work.
- Create space to discuss concerns and explore possible solutions.
- Provide assistance as needed but encourage staff to create their own work plans.

Directing

- Provide step-by-step instructions.
- Demonstrate steps involved in doing a good job.
- Clarify expectations related to each goal or objective.
- Monitor progress and compliance with rules and regulations.

Delegating

- Assign broad goals.
- Expect staff to create their own work plans.
- Allow staff to correct their own course along the way.
- Provide feedback on results rather than process.
- Encourage risk taking and entrepreneurship.

Adaptive Supervision

An effective supervisor adapts her own style to meet the needs of the staff she supervises. Use a directive supervisory style when a staff member is new in his position or facing an unusual assignment or responsibility. If the person has no experience with this sort of work, he may also have little confidence and require substantial time to develop the skills needed to be successful. By being directive, you ensure that the staff member understands and knows how to do each aspect of the job.

Coach staff when they possess some transferable skills and can, therefore, learn quickly. Familiarity with the work may provide them with a degree of confidence. However, they will benefit from hearing that you believe in their ability as well. They are likely to need your help; so be prepared to provide lots of clear feedback.

The facilitating style is most effective when a staff member has a fair amount of relevant experience but may not have successfully mastered all aspects of a particular task. They can reflect on previous experience in order to plan and problem solve but are likely to want to check out their ideas with you.

Delegate broad responsibility to staff members who have extensive experience and demonstrated success in the core aspects of their job. Often these employees are eager to take on new responsibilities and challenges. They benefit from your confidence in their ability to chart their own course and meet their goals independently.

“I use a directive approach, but I know some people need more space to process, so I’ve learned to adapt to different people I supervise.”

–Director

So, to be an effective supervisor, you need to master each of these supervisory styles. By matching your approach to the needs of your staff, you can help them succeed. However, using some of these styles requires behaving in ways that don't necessarily come naturally. But supervisors need to stretch and develop new skills, too. The rewards are well worth it: Successful and satisfied employees are critical to the overall effectiveness of your nonprofit organization.

You may use multiple styles with one supervisee. For example, you might use facilitating or delegating styles with a more senior staff person who has a lot of experience working with consumer/clients and then use coaching or directing when that staff person takes on a new role facilitating a taskforce and is unfamiliar about how to approach this work. Someone's disability might also require using aspects of certain supervisory styles as accommodations. For example, you might typically use a delegating style with a supervisee, but, if the supervisee has difficulty with organizing, they may need you to use a directing style to help them create detailed workplans. In addition, trauma history may impact supervisory styles. For example, a survivor of sexual or domestic violence may experience a directing approach as being controlling. This might require some modification or explanation of why a directing style might be helpful.

Tips for Adaptive Supervisors

Here are some tips for adapting your supervisory style to best meet the needs of your staff. Remember that while most of us prefer a certain approach to working with staff, effective supervision requires moving beyond our own comfort zones and practicing a range of behaviors. The tips below can help you figure out how to change your supervisory behavior in order to best support your staff members.

Note: The numbers 1 to 5 below refers to a range in skill level and experience with 1 having less experience or skills with certain tasks and 5 being more experienced or skilled.

If you are most comfortable directing and...

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 1:

You are in luck! A staff member functioning at this level needs you to explain, and even demonstrate each step of a job. Ask your employee to repeat your instructions in her own words to ensure that you have provided clear direction and that you are both on the same page.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 2:

Spend some time working with the staff member to create a workplace. Ask him to provide input and talk about your approach to structuring this sort of project. Express your confidence in this person and use concrete examples of ways he has succeeded in the past.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 3:

As hard as it may be, ask the staff member to propose a course of action. Remember that there isn't always a right way of doing things, and your staff member's approach may be different, but valid. Try to listen openly and receptively. But, at the same time, provide perspective and input as needed.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 4:

You are probably driving this person to distraction! Make sure that she is on the same page in terms of desired results or outcomes. But if she has been successful previously, don't get involved in planning how she will get there. Schedule times to check in. Let her know you

are available for consultation if it would be helpful. And leave her alone to do her work.

...your staff member's approach to this task is at 5:

You are probably driving this person nuts! Make sure that are on the same page in terms of desired results or outcomes. But if they have been successful previously, don't get involved in planning how they will get there. Schedule some times to check in, let them know you are available for consultation if it would be helpful, and leave them alone to do their work.

Remember to praise staff input when it is valuable and be sure to let them know when their work meets your expectations.

If you are most comfortable coaching and...

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 1:

You may feel frustrated with this person - and he may be frustrated with you. Though it may feel disrespectful, this person needs you to walk him through a process step by step. It will probably be helpful to actually show him how to do the work. And be sure to provide clear directions and check for understanding. Develop small goals and provide feedback frequently.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 2:

You are in sync with one another. Continue to plan out her work together. Remember to praise her input when it is valuable and be sure to let her know when the work itself meets your expectations. If she makes mis- takes, ask her how she might have done things differently. And be sure to articulate the changes you need to see.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 3:

Sometimes too much praise can seem disingenuous. Do acknowledge a job well done, but don't overdo it. Engage in conversation about the work. Problem solve together. And consider using this staff person as a sounding board for issues that come up in your own work.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 4:

Check your desire to be a cheerleader. Does this person really need to hear how confident you are in his work, or are you just ensuring

your own comfort level? Working with this person might not always feel safe to you. Let them take some risks, however, and try to remain focused on results.

...your staff member's approach to this task is at 5:

Check your desire to be a cheer leader. Does this person really need to hear how confident you are in their work or are you just meeting your own needs? Working with this person might not always feel safe to you but let them take some risks and try to remain focused on results.

Problem solve when it is helpful. Staff will benefit from bouncing ideas off of you.

If you enjoy facilitating and...

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 1:

Asking this person for input into planning and problem solving will probably confuse her. Until she understands exactly how you want a job done and has mastered all of the steps, it may be challenging for her to focus on anything beyond the micro level. She may be worried about disappointing you when she doesn't have anything valuable to add. If you aren't sure how to be most helpful, ask!

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 2:

Don't give this person more autonomy than he is ready for. He still needs you to work closely with him - even though he doesn't need you to provide all of the answers. Left to his own devices, this person may flounder, and you may not know he is struggling until it is too late.

Ask specific questions about his work- whether he is meeting deadlines, knows what to do next, and is able to juggle multiple priorities. Provide feedback and input accordingly and be sure to recognize small successes and learning opportunities.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 3:

This is a good match and probably feels like a satisfying relationship to both of you. Continue to brainstorm and problem solve together. Don't forget to talk with this person about professional development goals.

And look for ways to provide new challenges and opportunities.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 4:

You can probably let go a little bit more. This person still needs to meet with you regularly, but she doesn't usually need help or direction. The time you spend together might be better used to generate new ideas.

Give this staff member as much responsibility as you are able. Having her on board may save you time in the long run.

...your staff member's approach to this task is at 5:

You can probably let go a little bit more. This person still needs to meet with you regularly, but they don't usually need help or direction. The time you spend together might be better used to generate new ideas.

Give this staff member as much responsibility as you are able – having them on board may save you time in the long run.

If your favorite style is delegating and...

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 1:

This staff person is probably extremely overwhelmed and confused. He may leave conversations with you wondering why he doesn't understand what you are talking about. And he may also wonder whether he will ever be able to succeed at this work. Back up, and slow down. Most likely, he doesn't need all of the big concepts and information you want share. Break the job into small, manageable tasks. Teach the basic. Be extremely clear about your expectations. And make lots of time for this person. It might feel as if you are "speaking down" to this person, but he will probably be relieved by your new approach. Again, if you aren't sure, just ask.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 2:

It might be tempting to leave this person alone, but don't! She still needs your help charting a course of action. She needs to know if she is on the right track. If not, she needs to know what to do differently. She may interpret your distance as cold criticism. Be sure to let her know why you have confidence in her and celebrate success!

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 3:

Meet regularly with this person to find out how things are going. Ask him about his goals, and how he will achieve them. Problem solve when it is helpful. He will benefit from bouncing ideas off of you. But also provide big-picture context and forward thinking. Remember to share information you have access to that he may not be aware of.

...your staff member's approach to tasks is at 4:

This may feel like a match made in heaven. This person functions well without you and produces excellent results. Remember, however, that you are still her supervisor. She will always need some of your time, but you may gain as much from your conversations as she does.

...your staff member's approach to this task is at 5:

This may feel like a match made in heaven. This person functions well without you and produces excellent results. Remember though that you are still their supervisor. They will always need some of your time, but you may gain as much from your conversations as they do.



What is your natural supervisory style?

What supervisory style is most difficult for you?

What would help you to learn different supervisory styles?

Have a discussion with your supervisees about supervisory styles.

- What supervisory style do you prefer? Why?
- Are there supervisory styles that are unhelpful to you? Why?
- Are there different styles that you think will be helpful for different tasks that you are doing?

Regularly check in with your supervisee to see if using certain supervisory styles still works for them.

Reflective Supervision

All information about reflective supervision that is included in this document is adapted from training provided by Terri Pease, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health, 2008, 2015.

What is Reflective Supervision?

In reflective supervision a supervisor and supervisee are collaboratively reviewing and discussing staff's work. This process is focused on staff thoughts, opinions, and feelings as well as their work experiences, goals and plans. Rather than a supervisor telling a supervisee what to do, a supervisor asks open-ended questions to guide staff to reflect on their work and learn problem-solving skills.

Example of questions asked in reflective supervision:

- What are your thoughts about the situation?
- What have you tried?
- What has worked in the past in a similar situation?

What are the benefits of using reflective supervision?

Reflective supervision aligns with the value of empowerment that both rape crisis and independent living philosophies support. **While there are always power dynamics in supervision, reflective supervision helps to equalize power. The supervisor takes time to learn from the supervisee in order to determine how best to support them. The supervisor also builds skills for the supervisee, so that they can learn to problem-solve on their own. This is important for all staff, and especially for survivors with disabilities who have had choice and power taken from them and are often treated paternalistically.**

Pease and the National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health (2008, 2015) share the following benefits:

- Reflective supervision helps the relationship between supervisor and supervisee to be collaborative, rather than top-down.

- Reflective supervision empowers supervisees to assess their own performance.
- Modeling a reflective process helps supervisees to be able to do this in their work with clients/consumers, projects, etc.

A study of child welfare agencies found that agencies that use reflective supervision had lower rates of employee turnover and ultimately were more successful in placing children in permanent homes. This suggests that reflective supervision also benefits the organization by increasing retention and possibly improving outcomes for clients/consumers.

Using Reflective Supervision in Practice

Reflective supervision practice can be used in all aspects of supervision, but can be especially helpful for problem-solving, learning from mistakes, and using successes to learn what works. Reflective supervision can be used with any supervisory style. For example, even if you have a new staff person who benefits from the Directing approach, you can still follow-up after the staff person tries something to ask them to reflect on what they tried. For example, a staff person asks for assistance with a challenge that the consumer/client is having. You provide some suggestions. After they meet with the consumer/client you can ask them:

- “What did you try?”
- “What happened when you tried that?”
- “What worked? What didn’t work?”
- “What else might you try?”

This provides an opportunity for staff to process their work and learn how to go about solving similar problems in the future.

In section 2, we talk more in detail and provide more examples of using reflective supervision.

Section 2 - Areas to cover in supervision and application of techniques

Setting up the Supervisory Relationship

As outlined in **Part 2: On-Boarding** some of the initial things to talk about when establishing your supervisory relationship are your supervisee's learning and work style, accommodations, and vicarious trauma and self-care.

In addition, it is important to consider the issue of power dynamics and how that can impact supervisory relationships.

Note on Power Dynamics

Keep in mind the reasons you wanted to be a supervisor. We imagine it included supporting the success of your colleagues as well as for your own career advancement. Problem power dynamics occur when supervisors approach the opportunity to supervise in a "power over" way. Supervision should not be exclusively telling a supervisee what to do, expecting a supervisee to do things the way you do them, or focusing excessively on areas of concern. Skilled supervisors look for the strengths in their supervisees and help build and enhance those attributes to best meet their professional and program goals.

In addition, building trusting supervisory relationships includes being honest about power dynamics. Regardless of how collaborative a supervisor is, supervisors inherently have power over supervisees because they have decision-making authority and also evaluate the supervisee's performance. Power dynamics are also impacted by supervisor and supervisee identities and societal privilege and oppression.

Here are a few basic things you can do:

1. **Self-Reflect.** Reflecting on your authority as a supervisor as well as other aspects of power, such as class, race, ability, etc. is the first step to thinking about how these issues may impact your supervisory relationship. Whether you bring more or less social privilege – or a combination of both – as a supervisor, it is important to remember that you always have positional authority.

Below are some resources for self-reflection:

- o Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack by Peggy McIntosh
http://www.winnipeg.ca/clerks/boards/citizenequity/pdfs/white_privilege.pdf
 - o Diversity Profile
<https://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-workshop-guide-to-discussing-identity-power-and-privilege/#profile>
2. **Learn.** Learning about privilege and oppression is a life-long process. Seek opportunities for you and your supervisee to keep learning. Be open to learning from people who have been oppressed, but don't expect them to teach you everything. Take responsibility for your learning. Be open to feedback. Appropriately acknowledge and take responsibility for your own mistakes and missteps.
 3. **Acknowledge** privilege and oppression in supervision not only as it applies to clients and consumers, but also in regard to the supervisory relationship.

The issue of power dynamics between supervisors and supervisees is a complex one with many important implications. We are unable to fully discuss talking about and managing power dynamics in supervision in this document. Instead, we encourage supervisors to seek additional resources and trainings specifically focused on this important issue.



What power dynamics might come up in your supervisory relationship? How might you talk about this with your supervisee?

Accommodations

Ableism in the Workplace

As discussed in the Onboarding Manual, ableism may not always be obvious. Because we live in an ableist society, unconscious bias can impact workplace norms and values. One way this can show up is valuing certain skills or attributes over others. For example, workplaces may value employees who can produce the most, the most quickly, who are verbally eloquent, who work a lot of over time or take little sick and vacation time, just to name a few examples. Conversely, unconscious bias can result in employers having low expectations for the ability of people with disabilities and not providing feedback and opportunities for growth. A common bias is to hire people with disabilities in entry level jobs, but not promote or hire people with disabilities in management or other leadership roles. It is important for everyone in the organization, including supervisors to examine potential biases.

Because of ableism people with disabilities may be concerned with requesting accommodations or letting supervisors know that they have a disability. They may fear discrimination or that other employees will view accommodations as favoritism or an excuse. People with invisible disabilities in particular may have concerns that their colleagues will view them as lazy because they don't "look like someone with a disability." Also, people with disabilities that make it harder to read social cues may be perceived as being rude. Because of these stereotypes and assumptions of what disability looks like, people with "invisible disabilities" such as learning, mental health

disabilities, or chronic illness can often be misunderstood, overlooked, and not accommodated.

If you haven't yet, read these think-pieces written by employees with disabilities about navigating workplace environments:

- I struggled with mental health issues at work – here's how I'd support colleagues myself
<http://metro.co.uk/2017/10/10/i-struggled-with-mental-health-issues-at-work-heres-how-id-support-colleagues-myself-6969710/>
- How does mental illness affect my work performance?
<https://cpr.bu.edu/resources/reasonable-accommodations/jobschool/how-does-mental-illness-affect-my-work-performance/>
- 5 Things I Look for in an Employer as a Person with Chronic Illnesses
<https://themighty.com/2016/04/chronic-illness-and-employment-what-i-look-for-in-an-employer/>
- What it's like having dyslexia in the workplace - and how you can help
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/work/what-its-like-having-dyslexia-in-the-workplace---and-how-you-can/>
- 7 Things the Autistic Person in Your Workplace Needs from You
<https://medium.com/@AshleaMcKay/7-things-the-autistic-person-in-your-workplace-needs-from-you-d99d351b543f>

It is important to note that ableism, as all oppressions, impacts all people. It may impact survivors who have similar concerns about disclosing needs they might have such as taking work time for counseling or medical appointments. It may impact staff generally who may be concerned that if they disclose vicarious trauma or receive support for vicarious trauma they will be seen as not capable.

During the initial orientation, HR staff or supervisors should let staff know that they can request accommodations, but the reality is that survivors with disabilities may hesitate to disclose a need for accommodations. Staff may need time to evaluate whether a workplace will truly be supportive to a person with disability or they may need time to become familiar with a position to know what they need. Staff may also acquire a disability later. Keep discussion open and regularly remind supervisees that supervision is a space to discuss their ongoing needs and that it's important that they communicate their needs, so that the agency can help.

“It can be uncomfortable to bring up needed accommodations when I first start working at an agency because of stigma about disability. Often, it takes time to be sure that an agency really will be welcoming to me before I feel comfortable asking for accommodations.”

–Survivor with Disability

There are several specific points in time when we suggest a supervisor check-in with staff about accommodation needs.

- When a staff's job is changing either due to changes in their current job or a new position.
- Annual performance evaluations. In addition to evaluating performance and talking about future goals, it can be helpful to include conversation about any accommodations needed to help staff meet their goals or improve on performance challenges
- When staff are showing performance challenges. In addition to providing direct feedback, supervisors can ask what they or the agency can do to help staff improve. "I've noticed that you seem to be struggling with x. Let's talk about ways in which you can improve your performance. Are there any supports that you need from me or from agency to help with your performance?"

After an Accommodation is Provided

After an accommodation is requested, check-in with staff about whether the accommodation was provided and if so, how it's working. Supervision can be used to discuss if/how the accommodation is working for your supervisee. Use your reflective supervision skills and ask concrete questions, such as:

- I've noticed that moving your workstation to a quieter room has helped you complete your tasks. How are you finding this arrangement?
- What has worked?
- What is still difficult?
- What can we try this week?

Planning your Supervision Sessions

Effectively supervising your staff contributes to good morale, productivity and the prevention of problems. Regularly scheduled supervision is recommended in order to be able to successfully meet professional and program goals. Regular supervision builds a trusting relationship and regular opportunities to discuss accommodations, how work is impacting staff, and self-care. Supervision should be prioritized, and supervisors should minimize cancelling supervision meetings to communicate their importance. Hawkins and Shoet (2006) found that more informal and irregular supervision is not a beneficial supervisory practice. While specific needs of more experienced staff may change, regular supervision allows for the continual growth and support of staff, builds trust and rapport between supervisor and supervisee; and allows you to manage issues more quickly when they arise.

“Meeting weekly with my supervisor has helped me build a relationship with her, so that I feel more comfortable letting her know about accommodation needs. In addition, it provides me the time to be able to talk about on-going supports I need.”

–Survivor with Disability

A common challenge for supervisors to have workloads that don't allow for adequate time to meet and prepare for supervision. People supervising supervisors need to consider how to help supervisors have a balanced workload that includes supervising staff as a critical part of their job. Considerations need to be made regarding:

- The maximum number of staff that staff can supervise at a time and,
- The balance between the supervision work and other work that the supervisor is doing to ensure everyone is set up for success.

Structuring Supervision Meetings

Planning supervision helps to ensure that priority items get addressed. It is beneficial to set the agenda for supervision together. Some ideas for doing this are having a shared document to which supervisors and supervisees can add items. You can also ask the following reflective supervision questions at the beginning of your supervision session:

- What is on your mind about your work this week?
- Is there anything you'd like help with?
- What has gone well in your work this week?



Try it out

In the appendix on pp. 64-68 are [worksheets from TSNE MissionWorks for structuring supervision](#). For the next month, use these worksheets to plan for supervision.

Supporting Staff with Their Work

Managing Workloads

Helping staff maintain reasonable workloads is an organizational responsibility and is also an important part of a disability inclusive and trauma-informed workplace. Reasonable workloads prevent burnout and vicarious trauma for all staff and ensures that staff are able to function at their best. Research has shown that overwork leads to reduced productivity and poorer performance.

- The Research Is Clear: Long Hours Backfire for People and for Companies

<https://hbr.org/2015/08/the-research-is-clear-long-hours-backfire-for-people-and-for-companies>

- Overwork, Underperform: Why More Hours Leads to Less Productivity

<http://www.performanceexcellencenetwork.org/pensights/overwork-underperform-why-more-hours-leads-to-less-productivity/>

For people with disabilities, overwork and high stress can impact productivity in ways specific to their disability (e.g. someone with epilepsy whose seizures are triggered by high stress, someone who is prone to more migraines when stressed, increased PTSD symptoms).

What is considered “reasonable” is ideally outlined in the job description and includes both measurable (e.g. number of clients, number of projects) as well as other characteristics of the job (e.g a new project, working with a time consuming/challenging case). Some things to consider when helping staff manage their workloads are:

- Identify a key measure or two of their work. This may include the number of clients, projects, people whom staff supervise, meetings etc.
- Think about what would be considered an acceptable range of time for work to be completed. For example, one staff person might write very quickly and be able to complete a writing assignment in one hour. Another staff person might take longer and need 4 hours. By having an acceptable range rather than only valuing the person who can complete work the quickest you accommodate a range of work styles and abilities.

- Look at the complexity of the work being done. For example,
 - Helping a client/consumer with ability to pay for market rent find housing is less complicated than helping a client who is undocumented and struggling financially to find housing.
 - A supervisor who is trying to support staff on a performance improvement plan will be investing more time and energy in their supervisory role than usual.
 - A project or program that is losing a key staff member can impact a whole team as they reassign roles and deadlines.

In addition, what feels complex to staff may differ from person to person. Staff with more complex cases or situations may need to decrease the amount of work in order to have a manageable workload. It is also important, if possible, to ensure a balance in workload, so that the majority of staff's workload does not consist of complex situations.

- Diversity of workloads. Provide opportunities for staff to participate in a range of activities such as a variety of cases, legislative advocacy, training and outreach. This helps break up the work and also empowers staff by providing opportunities to take other perspectives in approaching challenges (such as thinking about policy solutions for situations consumers/clients are facing) and developing additional skills.

While a supervisor will gain experience in gauging a typical reasonable workload, deciding what is reasonable for a particular staff person is more of an art than a science. It is important to regularly check-in with staff about how the workload feels to them. Supervisors should notice and address if there are performance challenges or signs of burn-out or vicarious trauma.

It can be challenging for a supervisor to support staff with a balanced workload when the needs and demands are very high in the agency. Supervisors can recognize the work being done by their supervisee and proactively look for ways the workload can be managed. On-going challenges may require that supervisors talk to leadership to determine how the organization can support a balanced and reasonable workload. There are usually no quick, easy solutions, but examples of ways that organizations have worked to resolve this have included determining which agency work are priorities, adding internship or volunteer opportunities, hiring temporary staff, and seeking funding for additional staff.

Support with Problem-Solving

It is likely that staff will come to you with a dilemma that they are uncertain about how to solve. You can draw from what you have learned about active listening, supervisory styles, and reflective listening. Below is an example and questions to think about in helping staff to problem-solve.

Scenario:

A counselor is working with a survivor with an intellectual disability. She is having a hard time understanding the client's needs and is unsure if the client understands her communication style.

Using Supervisory Style

Think about which supervisory style to use with this staff person:

- What is the supervisory style that this staff is most receptive to?
- Where is the staff in their knowledge base and skill around this issue? (For example, someone who doesn't have knowledge or experience may be looking for the supervisor to tell them what to try and asking them for their ideas can feel like you are quizzing them. But someone with some experience, may just need you as a sounding board to decide how to approach this situation.)

Using reflective supervision

You can use reflective supervision to come up with some solutions together. By not always telling your supervisee how to handle situations, you teach them to be able to problem-solve themselves.

Questions you can ask:

- What have you tried? What happened when you tried that?
- What has worked in the past in a similar situation where you were having challenges with communication?
- Do you have other ideas of what to try?

 *Try it out*

What is a recent problem that a supervisee has shared with you?
How might you help your supervisee with the problem using what you've learned about supervisory styles and reflective supervision?

Provide opportunities to debrief/process work

Provide space for staff to debrief specific cases or projects. This includes providing space for supervisors to debrief successes and challenges in supervising staff. Validate staff feelings. Use these opportunities to problem-solve together, reflect on lessons being learned, and to appreciate the strengths of your supervisee. Talk about what staff can do to take care of themselves and what you can do to support them.

“I would like to be able to process my work and get feedback about what specifically went well and what could be improved, so that I can improve my work.”

–Advocate

Reflective supervision is particularly useful for helping staff learn from their work experiences. Certainly, you will not process all work that staff does in this way, but certain situations such as mistakes, breakthroughs, completion of a project etc. would be good times to use reflective supervision to process the work.

- Gather information
 - Listen to what staff have to share about their work
 - Clarify details
- Reflect
 - What were you trying to achieve?
 - What were the outcomes?
 - How do you feel about it?
 - What other things could you have done?
- Learn
 - What is something you wish you had known before the project or situation began?
 - What did you learn from this experience?
 - What role did you play in the incident or project?
 - How will it influence future process?



Try it out

What can you debrief or process with your supervisee? What questions will you ask them?

Learning from mistakes

Everyone makes mistakes and creating an environment that acknowledges this and uses mistakes as learning opportunities creates an environment where staff are more likely to seek support from supervisors earlier on. In addition, it helps to create an environment that allows people to try new things and take reasonable risks.

When staff make mistakes take a step back to reflect with your supervisee. Avoid jumping to conclusions or communicating an “I told you so” or “I knew that was going to happen” message. Build a shared understanding of what happened, so you can get to the root of the problem or situation. Asking open ended questions that promote critical thinking can be effective for problem solving and further communicate support for the work your staff is doing. Communicate that you understand that it can be rough to make a mistake, but that you can see that they are trying to learn from the experience.

Scenario:

A consumer/client tells an advocate some things that make the advocate concerned that their PCA may be abusing them. The advocate has had a hard time connecting with the consumer/client and is worried about breaking trust by making a mandated report. The advocate tells you, his supervisor almost 24 hours later about what happened.

What is your response? You may feel angry or frustrated that the advocate didn't come to you sooner. Take a deep breath! Work with the advocate to address the immediate needs. Then use this opportunity to learn more about what was going on for the advocate and help the advocate learn from this mistake.

Questions you can ask:

- Validate: It can be hard to make a mandated report. What made it hard for you to make a mandated report in this situation?
- What were the consequences of the choices made?
- What could be a different way to approach the situation in the future?
- Is there anything you would need from me (the supervisor) to feel comfortable coming to me with questions or concerns sooner?

Now your turn, try it out:

Scenario:

A staff person is working on projects under a grant. As part of this grant work, quarterly progress reports need to be submitted to the funder. The staff person misses the deadline for one of the reports.

What questions would you ask staff to help them reflect on and learn from mistakes made?

Defining, Celebrating, and Learning from Successes

It is easy to focus on the areas that require problem solving or where mistakes are made.

It's important to remember to also highlight staff successes and use successes for learning when appropriate.

Celebrating even “small” successes and managing expectations about what is considered a success can be helpful when advocating for systems change or working with people within imperfect/unjust systems. Having discussions about complex cases helps everyone better understand the impact of the work on your supervisee's feelings of success. This can help prevent burnout and vicarious trauma and keep people encouraged and motivated.

Discuss macro issues that impact the work that staff do such as limitations in resources both for clients/consumers and the organization, and societal attitudes such as rape culture and ableism. Help staff manage expectations based on these macro issues. A realistic goal for staff would be informing a consumer/client about resources, providing support and teaching someone to advocate for themselves. An unrealistic goal would be that every client or consumer would be able to obtain housing. Talk about what success means. Staff may be unable to help a consumer or client with a financial need based on barriers in the system, but they are in control of how they support a consumer or client, so success may mean the client or consumer having a positive experience with their advocate despite the outcome. Find ways to regularly highlight staff successes and strengths.

Tip: Remember to ask staff about a success in their week!

Learning from successes

Scenario:

Your development team surpassed a fundraising goal. You know that each of your supervisees has played a role in contributing to this success.

Questions to ask:

First, point out any obvious strengths that your supervisee brought to this situation. Highlighting individual successes is a good way to make your supervisee feel a part of the overall success.

- What did your supervisee do that contributed to the success?
 - Did they do something new or outside of their comfort zone?
 - Did they suggest something new or different that could have led to the overall success?
- How can what we learn from this success be applied to future work?

Now your turn, try it out:

Scenario:

You are supervising Jane who has been having difficulty managing Matt, their supervisee's performance. One day you note that recently you noticed an improvement in Matt's performance. You want to discuss what Jane did to help Matt.

What questions do you ask?



What are some of my supervisees' successes that I could use reflective supervision to talk through?

Professional development

Part of your role as a supervisor is not only attending to staff's day-to-day work but supporting them in their professional growth. This is important for building strong staff skills and retaining strong staff and also shows that you care about the career trajectory of your staff. When possible, diversify staff roles (e.g. range of cases or projects, mix of direct client/consumer work with training, etc) as a way to provide opportunities to learn different skills and to see the work from differing perspectives. Support staff professional development through seeking and supporting opportunities for webinars, trainings and conferences. Empowering staff by showing you care about their career and learning helps with managing vicarious trauma, burn-out, and compassion fatigue.

Supporting Staff in the Emotional Impact of their Work

Scenario A:

Your supervisee is telling you about a consumer/client she is working with who was recently sexually assaulted in her home and wants to move but is having trouble finding accessible housing. Your supervisee is really calm and seemingly unemotional as she is telling you about this.

Scenario B:

Your supervisee is telling you about working with a consumer who is having a hard time finding a PCA they feel safe with because of a past experience with sexual assault. As he's telling you this, your supervisee starts to cry and says he can't stop thinking about this consumer.

Which is a normal reaction to the work that the supervisees are doing? The answer is that both could be normal reactions! People might react in many ways to the work they are doing. Some might cry, some might get angry, some might seem to show no emotional reaction. It is important to proactively normalize a range of reactions to the work.

“Sometimes people get upset when working with people who are going through tough situations. Sometimes people don't feel much emotion. All of this is normal. Supervision can be a place to talk or get some feedback about your feelings and reactions to your work.”

Reflect on your own comfort level with different reactions that staff might have. Be self-aware of your own reactions when meeting with your supervisee. You could consider being transparent with your supervisee when applicable. For example, your supervisee begins to cry when talking about a consumer/client situation and you feel uncomfortable when people start crying. You can let staff know that it's normal to be upset and that you tend to be uncomfortable and not sure what to do when people are crying but want to know how to best

support them. Providing appropriate support to emotional reactions of supervisees include:

- Let supervisees know that an emotional reaction is normal.
- Use your active listening skills! Sometimes it helps just to be heard.
- Ask if there are ways the staff would like to be supported.
- If needed, refer to other resources such as EAP or counseling.

Example of an appropriate response to Scenario B could be:

The supervisor acknowledges frustration and sadness that the staff person is feeling. They create space to allow staff person to cry and talk about feelings related to the case and validates that these reactions make sense. Supervisor conveys caring and talks about self-care with staff.

It is important to be clear that your role is one of providing support, not counseling. The difference is that you are working with a colleague and have a specific role you are playing in their career. It is not that supervisors can't be an enormous support, but this role should not be confused with that of a counselor. Supervisors are responsible to keep the conversation at the level of support and caring, and to get their own guidance and supervision when they are concerned that they (or the supervisee) are having trouble with that boundary.

Some staff reactions may be impacted by personal experiences such as trauma or identifying with experiences of ableism. It is not the supervisor's role to determine whether certain reactions are the result of trauma or other personal experiences. If staff share personal stressors or experiences of trauma, definitely work with staff to determine how you can best support them in their work as they're experiencing these personal stressors. It isn't your role to help staff process their personal experiences though. While it is important to validate impacts of personal experiences on our work, boundaries are important for both supervisor and supervisee. Again, in some cases it may be hard to tell where that line is, and it can be helpful to talk about it with your supervisor.

Discuss self-care.

Studies have shown that a healthy balance of work, rest, and play, including socializing with friends and family is important in decreasing the effects of work stress and vicarious trauma. As a supervisor you can support staff in creating work/life balance by talking about the importance of self-care in supervision and helping your supervisee integrate self-care into their daily practice.

“As someone who has experienced sexual assault in my life, helping others who have gone through similar issues makes me feel like my job is more than just work. On the other hand, multiple interactions on a regular basis brings back memories. PTSD occurs sometimes when I don’t expect it, and I need to stop and separate myself from the work for a short time. If I don’t, I become less useful to clients, and it causes my own body to shut down for a while.”

–Survivor with Disability

Organizational structures that exist to promote self-care include flex/comp time, sick time, vacation time and personal days. Check-in with staff that they are using flex time or sick time when needed and scheduling vacation time to rest and get re-energized. Another organizational structure that may reduce stress and increase work-life balance includes the ability to work remotely/from home.

Supervisors who model a good work life balance say more than words do with the actions. So, don't forget your own self-care as a supervisor! What are some things you do on a regular basis to take care of yourself?

Supporting staff when the work is impacting them

Working at nonprofits that support people who have experienced trauma and oppression and advocate for societal and systems change is deeply meaningful and draws people who care deeply and are mission driven. At the same time, this work exposes staff to the traumatic and/or oppressive experiences of the people they serve and the reality of inadequate resources and inequitable systems. Research has begun to look at the connection between systemic oppression and PTSD, mostly in regard to racism, but this could apply to other forms of oppression, such as ableism. Regardless of the role of staff this exposure can have an effect. Different impacts on staff include burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma.

“I end up taking a lot of it home, and I’m trying to remember how to draw the line between work and home, but when you hear some of these stories, they are draining.”

–Advocate

Burnout

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion caused by excessive and prolonged stress. It occurs when you feel overwhelmed, emotionally drained, and unable to meet constant demands. As the stress continues, you begin to lose the interest and motivation that led you to take on a certain role in the first place. Some causes of work-related burnout include:

- Feeling like you have little or no control over your work
- Lack of recognition or reward for good work
- Unclear or overly demanding job expectations
- Doing work that's monotonous or unchallenging
- Working in a chaotic or high-pressure environment

Compassion Fatigue

Compassion fatigue is physical and emotional exhaustion and numbness that affects people in the “caring” professions. In the literature, sometimes compassion fatigue is differentiated from vicarious trauma and sometimes it is described as another term for vicarious trauma.

Vicarious Trauma or Secondary Trauma

Vicarious trauma is a range of reactions and changes in worldview that is caused by exposure to other people’s traumatic experiences. Some of the ways that vicarious trauma can impact staff include:

- Fatigue, sleepiness, or difficulty falling asleep;
- Getting sick more often;
- Avoiding work and interactions with consumers and colleagues;
- Difficulty managing emotions;
- Feeling emotionally numb or shut down;
- Being easily distracted;
- Loss of a sense of meaning in life and/or feeling hopeless about the future;
- Feeling vulnerable or worrying excessively about potential dangers in the world and loved ones’ safety;
- Lack of or decreased participation in activities that used to be enjoyable.

One of the goals of supervisors is to support supervisees in order to prevent burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. In addition to the information provided in this manual, the following resources are available to supervisors:

- [Handout for supervisors from the Vicarious Trauma Toolkit \(pp. 69-75\).](#)
- The tool on supporting staff with self-care is included in the Appendix on pp. 38-40 of the **Part 2: On-Boarding** manual . This tool includes what to discuss to all staff to prevent vicarious trauma and what to discuss during times of high stress (either at work or in the staff person's life).

Staff may not always identify what they're experiencing as the result of the emotional impact of their work (which can show up as physical signs) or may be hesitant to share concerns with their supervisors. Talking openly about this issue creates a safe space for staff to discuss these concerns. Also, as a supervisor, you can look out for signs that might indicate that staff are experiencing burn-out or vicarious trauma. Bring up your observations and concerns to staff. You can use your reflective supervision skills to ask staff to reflect on whether there are work-related stressors causing these reactions or what can be done at work to support them. Remember that your role is to be empathetic but focus on work related solutions; not act as a counselor.

“As a survivor, having a supervisor who recognizes the impact of the work we do and checks in about vicarious trauma helps me know that it's okay to talk about this in supervision.”

–Survivor and Advocate

Managing Needs of Agency and Needs of Supervisee

There may be some instances where the needs of the supervisee and the organization do not align. For example, a direct service advocate states that they cannot work with clients anymore because of PTSD or a receptionist is frequently absent because of a disability. These situations can be very challenging for supervisors who need to consider what the organization needs in order to provide services well and how to support the supervisee.

Here are some steps a supervisor can take in these situations:

Step 1:

Have a conversation with staff to determine if there are any accommodations that would allow them to be more successful in their work. You may make some suggestions, but also ask the staff person for ideas for solutions.

To use the example of the staff person who states that they can't work with clients any more, some things to consider are:

- Can the client load be adjusted? Is the number of clients that the staff person is working with too high? Are the cases that the staff person currently has complex or especially triggering for the staff person?
- Can we offer additional supports? Does the staff person need additional supervision sessions or outside resources such as counseling?
- Does the staff person need a leave of absence to get the support they need?

Step 2:

Determine if the agency would be able to restructure the position?
Does the organization have enough resources to restructure someone's job?

- Could some of the duties of the staff person change? For example, the advocate could see fewer clients and do some work developing resources to benefit clients. The receptionist could take phone calls two days a week from the office and provide other office support that can be done remotely on other days.
- Is it possible to change the position to a part-time position?

Step 3:

Determine if there is another position that the staff person could fill.

- Is there an opening for a different position at the agency that would be a better fit for the staff person? For example, the receptionist may be able to work remotely and may be able to work in a position that doesn't require them to be in the office regularly.
- Is there an opportunity to create another position? Is there a need that the agency has that could be filled by the staff person and is there funding to create a new position?

Step 4:

Unfortunately, there may be situations when accommodations don't resolve the situation or where the agency does not have the resources to offer alternatives. An agency may determine that it is not possible to continue to employ someone. As a supervisor, you can still offer support to your supervisee by assisting them with next steps, such as identifying strengths and types of positions that might be a good fit, offering to write references and helping with additional resources.

Sample language:

I'm sorry that we weren't able to find something that would be a good fit for you here. I want you to find something that fits your strengths, so that you can feel successful in your work. These are the strengths that I've observed _____.

Positions that have these qualities _____ might be a good fit for you.

APPENDIX

- Supervision and Vicarious Trauma Resources
- TSNE MissionWorks Worksheets for planning supervision
- Vicarious Trauma for Supervisors handout
- Tool to Support Supervisors with Staff Self-Care

Supervision Resources

The following are a few additional resources regarding supervision.

- **Training**

TSNE MissionWorks

<https://www.tsne.org/training>

- **Supervision manuals**

https://www.compasspoint.org/sites/default/files/documents/MANUAL_SupervisionPart1_NL_Aug2018.pdf

- **Guidelines for Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization**

For the full Vicarious Trauma Toolkit go to:

<https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/>

¹Structuring Supervision

Spontaneous conversations in the hallway and team meetings should never replace regularly scheduled individual supervision with each member of your staff. These meetings provide employees with a predictable time during which they will have your undivided attention. You and your staff can make best use of this time by both being prepared. Meetings allow you to focus on the following types of information:

- Are there action points from your last meeting to check in on?
- Do you have information to share?
- Do you need to spend time together planning or problem solving?
- How is your staff person managing interpersonal relationships with colleagues and employees she or he may supervise?
- How is your relationship working?
- Are there professional development issues to be addressed?

¹ TSN MissionWorks Effective Supervision, Structuring Supervision

It is important to remember that planning for and conducting supervision meetings will take a significant portion of your time. Effectively supervising your staff is an investment that contributes to good morale, productivity and the prevention of problems.

Date: _____

Checking in on these projects/tasks:

Talking about how the following relationships are going:

Exploring upcoming work:

WORKSHEET

Discussing these aspects of our supervisory relationship:

I need to ask about these items from our last meeting:

I will report back on these things we discussed last time:

Other items from last supervision:

Date: _____

Short-term Action Steps

The staff person agreed to complete the following tasks:

Task 1

_____ by date: _____

Task2

_____ by date: _____

Task3

_____ by date: _____

I agreed to complete the following tasks:

Task 1

_____ by date: _____

Task2

_____ by date: _____

Task3

_____ by date: _____

Future

Items for us to discuss next time:

Upcoming projects:

I can be more helpful by:

Professional development needs or possibilities we've discussed:

Other notes or issues to track:

²Guidelines for a Vicarious Trauma-Informed Organization

Supervision

What is a Vicarious Trauma- Informed Organization?

Vicarious trauma (VT), the exposure to the trauma experiences of others, is an occupational challenge for the fields of victim services, emergency medical services, fire services, law enforcement, and others. Working with victims of violence and trauma changes the worldview of responders and puts individuals and organizations at risk for a range of negative consequences (Bell, Kulkarni, and Dalton, 2003; McCann and Pearlman, 1990; Newell and MacNeil, 2010; Vicarious Trauma Institute, 2015; Pearlman and Saakvitne, 1995; Knight, 2013). A vicarious trauma-informed organization recognizes these challenges and proactively addresses the impact of vicarious trauma through policies, procedures, practices, and programs.

For more information on vicarious trauma and its effects, visit <https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/>.

*Note: Although these guidelines were created by a victim services organization, they contain insights and practices that first responder organizations can modify for their own use.

² https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/ojpasset/Documents/SUP_in_a_VT_Informed_Organization-508.pdf

Regardless of their role, all workers in a victim services organization are exposed to trauma and are at risk for the negative effects of VT. Supervision has been shown to be effective at decreasing the negative effects of exposure to the trauma experiences of others on staff and helping to mitigate turnover, burnout, and low morale. (Bell, Kulkarni, and Dalton, 2003; Middleton and Potter, 2015). In a vicarious trauma-informed organization, supervisors have the requisite knowledge and skills to help their staff and volunteers address VT.

Recommendations for Vicarious Trauma-Informed Supervision

Create a Safe Space for Addressing Vicarious Trauma

- Design a workplace that is safe, fosters collaboration, demonstrates respect for diversity, and acknowledges the importance of addressing VT on a regular basis.
- Affirm the importance of staff and volunteers and the work they do for the organization to advance its mission (Canfield, 2005).
- Provide regularly scheduled supervision that is evaluated by both the supervisor and the employee or volunteer.
- Acknowledge staff differences (e.g., in culture, race, identity, gender, survivor status, work experience) and discuss how they inform one's work and experience of VT.
- Openly discuss exposure to trauma and the resources available to help employees and volunteers address VT.
- Ensure that any discussion of the trauma history of a staff member or volunteer is solely to identify its potential impact on their work and their risk for vicarious traumatization.

Manage Workload and Expectations

- Monitor staff and volunteer workloads and jointly set realistic expectations for meeting clients' needs including, but not limited to, extra time for non-English speaking clients, time for writing notes, formal and informal meetings, stress-reducing and self-care activities, and time off (Schauben and Frazier, 1995).
- Attend to the "whole person," understanding the employee's client caseload, other life stressors, and symptoms of vicarious traumatization (Cerney, 1995; Trippany, Kress, and Wilcoxon, 2004).
- Offer staff and volunteers opportunities to have a wide range of cases and other work responsibilities (e.g., varied types of cases, policy advocacy, training, outreach).
- Offer opportunities for professional development through participation at conferences, trainings, and community meetings that also strengthen collaborations.
- Represent the organization on committees and task forces that address systemic issues.
- Discuss macro issues that impact both the supervisor and employee or volunteer (e.g., lack of critical resources for clients, lack of adequate staffing).
- Remind staff and volunteers of the important contributions they make for clients despite limited resources.

Identify and Address Warning Signs

McCann, Lisa I., and Laurie Ann Pearlman. 1990. "Vicarious

- Be familiar with the warning signs of vicarious traumatization (Yassen, 1995) including, but not limited to...
 - disengagement from work, colleagues, and supervisor;
 - anger at clients;
 - changes in interpersonal relationships (e.g., less compassionate and patient, more irritable and negative);
 - incomplete or late paperwork; and
 - no recent time off or vacations.
- Discuss any warning signs you see with the employee or volunteer ("I have observed these things—have you?"), with a focus on introducing effective coping strategies.

Support Supervisors

- Recognize the organization's responsibility to its supervisors by addressing their needs as they manage the impact of VT on their staff and volunteers.
- Provide opportunities for supervisors to attend trainings about both supervision and strategies for addressing VT.
- Create forums for supervisors to use to debrief and discuss challenging issues with their staff and volunteers.
- Ensure that supervisors have varied workloads and supervise a reasonable number of staff and volunteers.

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For more information about vicarious trauma, visit <https://vtt.ovc.ojp.gov/>.

Tool to Support Supervisors with Staff Self-Care

Introduction

This is a tool to help supervisors support supervisees with self-care and management of burnout or crisis. The intent is to normalize the impact of the work we do and also prevent (and if needed, address) burnout, compassion fatigue and vicarious trauma. There is no single solution or plan that will work for everyone, so it is encouraged that it is developed to meet the needs of both staff and supervisor. If you need guidance, reach out to HR.

1. Preventative Self Care

Preventative self-care works best when things are going well, and you are working with staff to maintain self-care in order to prevent burnout, compassion fatigue or vicarious trauma. This includes proactively planning regular use of vacation time, scheduling routine health care appointments, and any other activity that contributes to the overall health of staff that can be planned in advance.

Providing Support can include:

- Regularly checking in about workload balance
- Helping staff process and problem solve around their work
- Helping staff process emotional impact of their work, when applicable
- Highlighting work successes
- Supporting staff with professional development
- Encouraging use of comp time when applicable
- Encouraging regular use of vacation time
- If staff generally have difficulty with taking comp time or vacation time help staff plan for time-out
- Discussing self-care generally with staff

Guiding Questions can include:

- What is keeping work manageable for you?
- What are you doing for self-care during your workday?
Outside of work?
- What is a success in your work week?
- What is most meaningful to you about your work?

2. Stress Management

This is generally when the workload, work/life, or life is operating at a higher volume or stress level. Without taking time to rest, restore energy, and return to work, staff will likely reach burnout. While not always easy to bring up, supervisors should bring it up right away if they feel their supervisee is being stretched too thin, so that you can make a plan together to address stress before full burnout approaches.

Providing Support can include:

- Talking with staff about what can most help them during this time
- Outlining urgent tasks vs. tasks that can be completed at a later time
- Discussing temporary adjustments to workload
- Coordinating with colleagues/team for coverage support
- Discussing any concerning behavior or language and offer other ways of processing the impact of stress in ways that respect coworkers, consumers, and the workplace.
- Discussing if flex time or remote work (if possible, with the role) could help
- Planning with staff to take a personal day or vacation day(s) soon to rest, reconnect with their support network, rejuvenate their energy, etc.
- Checking-in to see if strategies are helping and reminding staff to let you know should they experience burnout or crisis

Guiding Questions can include:

- In past times when you've felt stress, how does stress affect you?
- What has been helpful for you in the past after a stressful time?
What are accommodations we could set up now? (e.g. check-in during busy times, discuss self-care plan, plan around important deadlines as much as possible, etc.)
- What plan could we set in place if you experience burnout?