Supervision Issues in Field Instruction

Field Instructor Online Workshop #4
Workshop Objectives

By the end of this workshop module, the participant will be able to:

1. Recognize supervision issues to address with social work interns;
2. Identify ethical and liability issues in supervision of students; and
3. Utilize supervision strategies presented in the workshop.
Field Supervision

**Definition:** The professional relationship between a field instructor and a student intern that provides evaluation and direction of the services by the student intern and promotes professional development of knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide social work services.

**Three Functions:**
- Administrative
- Educational
- Supportive
Field Supervision

- Four Major Content Areas:
  - Practice Skills
  - Professional Roles & Skills
  - Job Management Skills
  - Continued Learning Skills
Purposes & Roles of Supervision

- Teaching and role modeling practice skills
- Sharing professional and ethical knowledge/experiences
- Monitoring practice and clinical competence
- Evaluating student self-awareness and functioning
- Socialization to the profession and professional etiquette
Responsibilities of the Field Instructor

- Providing structure and purpose for supervision
- Helping the intern develop strategies and skills
- Monitoring the quality and quantity of work
- Ongoing formative evaluation and formal evaluation
- Providing support for the student
Positive Factors in Supervision

- Mutual respect
- Honesty
- Fairness
- Recognition of power differential
- Awareness and open discussion of diversity issues
Providing Supervisory Feedback

- Clarification of expectations and outcomes for supervision
- Timely feedback on an on-going basis
- Structured, consistent one hour weekly supervision meetings
- Address both strengths and areas in need of development or improvement
- Thoughtful and planned presentation of material by both the field instructor and the student
- Oral and written documentation of supervision sessions
Responsibilities of the Intern

- Making use of supervision in an open and non-defensive manner
- Sharing details of her/his work and processing issues with the field instructor
- Providing feedback to the field instructor about the intern’s needs and learning goals
- Contributing to the work at the agency as a team member
- Being accountable for job management skills and professional development
What Interns Need

- Sharing your expertise & practice wisdom
- Assistance with developing communication and practice skills – the “how-to” of social work
- Guidance and trustworthiness so interns develop confidence and are willing to challenge themselves
- Processing of personal and professional responses to field experiences and supervision
What Interns Don’t Need

- Authoritarian or demeaning treatment
- Unclear expectations and ambiguity in roles and responsibilities
- Comparison to other interns or other social work programs
- Unrealistic expectations and activities for the student’s current level of abilities
- Too much independence, too soon into the internship and lack of timely monitoring
Red Flags in Supervision

- Emotionally or psychologically unstable; medical non-compliance
- Overwhelmed with personal/family issues
- Impulsive and/or lack problem-solving abilities
- Past unresolved history and current issues that could surface with clients
- Unrealistic expectations and highly critical personality
- Power/control issues
More Red Flags

- Narcissistic and entitled attitude
- Lack of self-awareness and ability to process
- Lack of professional development and work habits
- Does not demonstrate empathy
- Has inappropriate affect or emotional reactions
- Boundary and role conflicts with clients, peers, and professionals
Group Supervision

Positives:
1. Sharing of learning experiences
2. Processing with peers
3. Helps with time and resource issues

Negatives:
1. Inhibits some disclosures
2. Reduces confidentiality
3. Impacts of group dynamics and roles on peer working relationships
Other Stakeholders Involved

- Clients
- Placement agency and other community agencies
- Agency employees and other community professionals
- University and BSW & MSW Programs and faculty
- Potential employers
- Licensing Board
Developing a Supervision Plan

- Mutual process between the field instructor and the intern
- Defining the areas of work and skill development
- Identifying issues to be explored during supervision
- Agenda for discussion and other learning opportunities
- Specific time and day for meeting weekly
Guidelines for Supervision

- The intern has limited experience applying theory, concepts, and techniques – shadow and observe periodically
- The field instructor is a role model and shares knowledge and skills
- Communicate clear goals and expectations for supervision time
- Integrate course content with application in field experiences
- Assign appropriate learning tasks and reading
- Encourage professional development and use of self

Ethical & Liability Issues

- **Direct Liability** - whenever harm is caused by erroneous actions or omissions by the supervisor (i.e. assigning case for which the intern is inadequately trained or experienced)

- **Vicarious Liability** – whenever harm is caused by erroneous acts or omissions by the intern/supervisee (i.e. negligent supervision based on contract law {*respondent superior* - Let the master respond}). As the supervisor has authority and responsibility of the intern/supervisee, the supervisor can be held responsible.

- **Standard of Care** – social workers in training or internships are held to the same standard of care as their trained colleagues

- **Professional Gatekeeping Responsibilities** – concerns about intern’s fit for the social work profession; ethical and values dilemmas/conflicts; documentation for evaluation or possible termination from the agency placement or BSW/MSW program

- **Malpractice Insurance** – interns covered by the College of Applied Arts; field instructors covered by individual or agency policy
Potential Conflicts of Interests

- Supervising relatives, friends, or colleagues
- Multiple roles in agency and supervision responsibilities
- Developing relationships with students outside of the work environment or after internship
- Self-paying for supervision
- Student needs vs. client and field instructor priorities
Sexual Harassment

- Address in orientation with students by both field program and the agency;
- Types: field instructor/intern; intern/client; intern/intern; faculty/intern
- Student intern knowledge of how to report and who to report to
- Trust issues and other student concerns in reporting
Letters of Reference

- Common request by recent and past interns for employment or graduate programs
- Do not assume confidentiality of what you write or say
- Be objective and give examples of behaviors or abilities
- Be honest and fair by addressing both positives and negatives
- Be open with the student about concerns and a negative reference