

National Hub for Supervision in Education

FAQs

Why am I being offered Supervision and not coaching or mentoring?

Whilst there are crossovers there is a fundamental difference in that supervision is about the children/young people that you work with. In coaching or mentoring the focus is on you and your development. In supervision the focus is on the children/young people first.

The supervisee brings to supervision all of who they are at work and sometimes this will include the need for coaching type conversations or aspects of mentoring but the contract for meeting is to hold the children at the heart.

You might be reflecting on a safe-guarding issue, a team issue, an issue around thinking about a particularly distressed child but the focus will always hold your professional responsibilities at heart. Your well-being is cared for but in the context of how that impacts on the education of the children.

Supervisees quickly experience the relationship, when it is good, as being the only place that they can take confidential professional/personal experiences that affect them deeply once all the other practical measures have taken place in their job. For example, they have been through all the necessary safeguarding measures, but they have queries about their own responses to an aspect of the process or are left holding an ethical dilemma, for example.

This kind of supervision is not management supervision and should not be delivered by line managers. There needs to be distance.

As one executive Principal Head recently said:

“Entering into it for the first time I struggled to understand how it would be different from leadership coaching.... It is different.

For the first time last month, during a particularly stressful time, I looked for when the next session was in my diary. Being supervised effectively gives emotional support just by knowing you have a session coming up when you will have an opportunity to share.

With a good supervisor, it is comforting to hear the issues you bring are common among leaders of schools and my emotional response is rational to the situation I find myself in.”
Pete Jenkins

Supervision is about being as competent as you can be and about knowing that having time and space to reflect will only increase your capacity to be the best you can be at work. It is career long work and is not just there for times of crisis or overwhelm but is regularly there – no matter what.

What can I expect from a first supervision session?

You can expect that it will be held in the same place with the same person, whether that be by Skype/Zoom or Face to Face. It will begin and end on time. You will be made to feel welcome and you will be made clear about the confidentiality agreement between you.

It is the supervisees responsibility to mentally prepare for supervision sessions and to engage in the process of being professionally vulnerable with the supervisor for the good of the children /yp you work with.

You can expect to be met with kindness and professionally supported through a process that will enable you to air whatever is most pressing for you at work at the current time. In this respect it is the most immediate source of ongoing learning for you as it meets your current needs and those of the children in your school.

What happens in a session will be different every time and will be shaped by what you need to bring, your supervisor and the relationship you create. There is no set pattern for a session except that it is there for you to explore work related issues and successes. (Those are really important).

Your supervisor will be someone who notices closely your highs and lows at work and they will be available to you as the relationship continues and you develop your own internal sense of a supervisor.

You can expect to enjoy the session, even if it is sometimes challenging. Most of us relish knowing that there is someone out there that we feel safe with but who we know will challenge us or hold us to account if needed.

A different holding to account from most others that educators encounter but the one the one which really matters! Your own internal professional/personal accountability.

Why embed a culture of Supervision in my school?

Really the question is why would you not? There is not a single reason against and everything for it. The impact is profound.

Educators engaged in supervision are more likely to be able to be working from a place of balance and of feeling deeply supported.

Educators who are held within an environment of good supervision are empowered to act from a place where they have more access to their creative, compassionate selves because they are being regularly supported in their practice.

Supervision will reduce the build-up of toxicity in a culture and in interpersonal relationships. There will be a place where such feelings have been able to be voiced in some way and if this is embedded in a school the impact is exciting.

Educators are more resourced and resilient around the children which immediately impacts on their behaviour. Supervision completes the cycle of support. Incidentally, supervision also benefits educators' personal relationships as they are not carrying work dis/stress home in the same way. It is supported and regularly worked with.

How often does supervision take place?

We recommend that it is at least an hour a month if it is 1-2-1. If it is a small group then still monthly and up to 2 hours in order that there is time for the amount of people needing to be able to engage.

One of the important "success" factors in supervision is the **relationship** that is established.

It takes 5/6 sessions for this to happen and for each to be able to more relaxed and "in flow". The supervisee will start to know and anticipate the sessions, and this enables staff to better carry stress as it is time limited. Knowing there is a date in a diary where you KNOW it will be addressed in a way that is transformative and helpful, even if it feels impossible currently, is part of the power of the ongoing career long nature of supervision. This allows a new and hugely valuable skill.

The supervisee will develop their own internal sense of their supervisor and will be able to check with this version of their supervision in between sessions. They can think and feel into how they would work through it in session, "as if" they were with their supervisor. So, less than monthly sessions means that the relationship cannot get built in the same way and too much distance occurs. Its sense of predictability and recurrence is vital.

What does supervision not include or entail?

Supervision is not counselling though it is often appropriate that a level of the personal comes in at times. What stops it being counselling is the agreed purpose of what is held in supervision, which is work and the children/yp.

Supervisors are trained to be able to hold these boundaries and know when to suggest further support might be appropriate. If we are experiencing the loss, bereavement of someone for example it might be that supervision supports you in knowing when and how to take some time out....and how to know when you are ready to return.

Should I like my supervisor and what if I don't?

In short – yes!

It cannot work if you do not feel safe and respected. It does not mean that supervision is not right for you it just means you have not found the right person to be professionally vulnerable with. Try again and ask for someone else from the Hub. None of us can possibly be right for everyone.

It is also true that we will have different needs at different times. It is usual to work with someone you like for years. It is likely that over your career you will have a couple of long and good supervisory relationships. These will be hugely impactful on your development. Don't forget that every supervisor you have is also in supervision themselves.