



Group Supervision Process: Building a Network

Part of the Signs of Safety Implementation Documents
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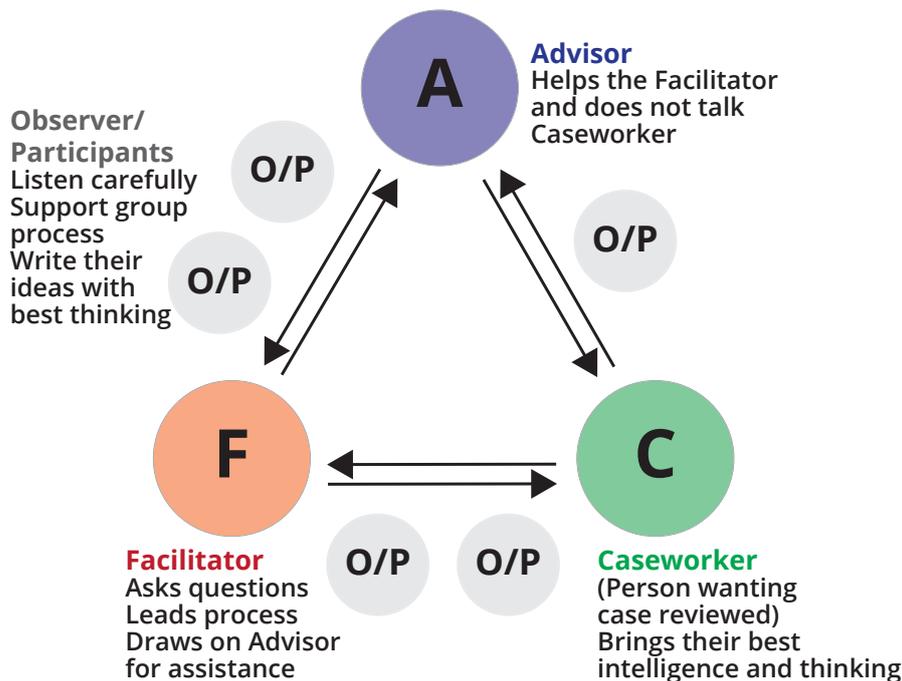
Signs of Safety Group Supervision Process: Building a Network

The Importance of Building a Network

Every traditional culture knows the wisdom of the African saying ‘It takes a village to raise a child’. A child who is connected to many people who care for them will almost always have a better life experience and be safer than an isolated child. So, safety planning work always involves requiring that the parents get as many people as they can involved in helping them create a safety plan. One of the most important aspects of involving an informed, naturally occurring network around the family is that this breaks the secrecy and shame that typically surrounds situations of child abuse.

Group Supervision Process

This Signs of Safety group supervision process is designed for groups of 4 to 10 people. It revolves around the caseworker who brings forward the case. (Sometimes, of course, there is a number of people bringing forward the case). The facilitator leads the group process, assisted by an advisor. Other group members are involved as observers/participants. The roles of each are described in the following diagram:



The entire group, but in particular the facilitator and advisor, must focus on the process and not get caught up or over-organized about the content and detail of the case. This process is all about growing the capacity for the team to create together a fast process for working through, and getting direction in, a case. As with every meeting in child protection, effective meetings are always led skilfully.

Group Process

1. Introductions (2–3 minutes)

If the group is new to the group supervision method, the facilitator should introduce the process, including a quick description of each person's role:

- The facilitator is the ONLY person who talks directly to the caseworker.
- The advisor acts to assist the facilitator to lead the process.
- The observers/participants have the opportunity to learn by staying out of the content of cases and focusing on analysis and judgement processes, thereby assisting the worker to gain a better overview of the case and the direction he/she wants to take.

The facilitator has the professionals, the caseworker, and anyone directly involved in the case say who they are, what their role in the case is, and how long they have been involved in the case. The facilitator will probably need to prevent the professionals involved in the case from going into case content at this point.

2. Genogram (3 minutes)

The facilitator draws the family genogram to include the basic information of age along with the names of the immediate family parents, partners, children, extended family members, and relevant friends. This should include clarifying where children are living, if not with one or both parents. Again, to keep the process focused, this is not the time to describe case information.

3. Background Information (3–5 minutes)

The facilitator gives the worker 3–5 minutes to provide an overview of the case, usually by asking, 'What makes this an open child protection case now?' The worker should be allowed to talk without interruption. The facilitator and observers should make notes of the worker's exact words and begin to analyse the information. While listening, the facilitator can make notes at the side of the whiteboard and should not be trying to 'map' the case by locating information into particular columns. The more experienced workers become at using the process, the more succinct they will be at providing the critical information that is needed to move through the process.

4. Worker's Goal (3–5 minutes)

This is THE MOST important part of the preparatory steps because it provides clear focus for the facilitator and group.

Ask: 'What do you want out of this consultation in relation to building a network?' The facilitator should dig in a little to get a clear, specific goal. If the worker says, 'I want to know what to do next,' this is too general and the facilitator should ask what specifically they feel they need help with in order to figure out what to focus on next.

If the worker says, 'I want to build a network for the family,' the facilitator can point out that in addition to that being something we support the family to do, and don't do for them, it is a goal for outside of this session. The facilitator then asks something like, 'OK, so you want to support the family to build a network. What do you need from this consultation to help you move towards achieving that?'

5. Finding Support People: Large Group Exercise

'Resistance is dead.' – Steve de Shazer

The issues parents have with bringing forward support people are not 'resistance'. They reveal the exact reasons the past problems have happened and present fantastic opportunities to dig into those issues with the family and parents.

We need always to distinguish if this is our issue or theirs. Is our thinking getting in the way of them possibly finding support people? Do we say they have no one? Do we say the people they have are all problematic or burnt out or won't help, etc?

For the Large Group Case:

- 5.1 The facilitator asks the worker what the top three 'resistances' fantastic opportunities are that the parents offer when discussing the possibility of involving support people.
- 5.2 Choose one.
- 5.3 Everyone creates their best questions to that issue and writes their responses under the following headings:

Difficulty/Challenge (e.g. <i>The family will disown me if they know I am pregnant.</i>)		
	Negative	Positive
PAST	(e.g. What has been the worst reaction from the family in the past when they have heard news they are not happy with about a family member? Who reacted the worst? What did they say/do? What was the worst thing that happened because of them finding out?)	(e.g. What has been the best reaction from the family in the past when they have heard news they are not happy with about a family member? Who reacted the best? What did they say/do? What was the best thing that happened from them finding out?)
PRESENT		
FUTURE		

- 5.4 Everyone shares their responses in groups of 3 to 4.
- 5.5 The facilitator seeks a sample of questions from the large group to share with the worker who has brought their case forward.
- 5.6 The facilitator asks the worker: ‘What questions do you think will be most useful to you?’
- 5.7 The group provides a copy of its questions to the worker who has brought their case forward.

6. Finding Support People: Individual Exercise

If relevant and time permits, the above process can be repeated with participants working on their own cases individually or in pairs.

7. Review and Next Steps

The facilitator now reviews the process so far by asking the worker: ‘What has been most useful for you about the process so far?’ Then the facilitator asks: ‘On a scale of 0 to 10 – where 10 means I’ve got what I need from the consult already and 0 means I’m no better off or any clearer than when we started – where are you?’ If the group has stayed on track, the worker should be rating relatively high at this stage. The facilitator then asks the worker if this is this enough for now. If the answer is yes, end here.

If no, ask, ‘What else do you need to focus on?’ and spend some time on that, usually by listening to the issue and getting questions created for that issue.

A low rating from the worker probably indicates the group process has gone off track significantly from what the worker wanted, or that the worker actually now wants something else or perhaps is feeling swamped and anxious about the case. Whatever the problem, the facilitator will need to back up and help the worker identify where the sticking point is and agree on a process to deal with that.

8. Review Process for Group

The advisor leads a review with the whole group about what was useful, what they learned, and any issues they have. (The review should not be about the content of the case).

How Often Do We Use This Group Process in the Agency or Team?

When presenting and teaching this group mapping process, these questions are often asked: ‘How often should we do this in our agency? Do we do this in every case?’

This group process is designed to:

- build a shared, structured, collective team and agency culture, and process for thinking through cases using the Signs of Safety approach;
- enable child protection professionals to explore each other’s cases, bringing their best thinking, including alternative perspectives, and to do this without getting

caught in one or two people dominating or the group telling the practitioner whose case it is or what they must do;

- develop a shared practice of bringing a questioning approach to casework, rather than trying to arrive at answers.

This group process cannot be undertaken in every case discussion. However, the process can be replicated in individual supervision and when practitioners are thinking through cases for themselves.

Building and sustaining this sort of questioning culture for thinking through cases as a team usually requires this process being undertaken at least once every two to four weeks.

The process presented here offers quite a tight structure, because helping professionals often tend to default to individual supervision, so group supervision is not a normal part of most agencies' practice. Where group supervision is normal, the group conversations can often be very free form and unstructured with little sense of shared purpose. If the majority of quality supervision is individual, this creates a very privatised practice culture within the agency, places excessive pressure on the team leaders or supervisors to be the fount of all wisdom for all practitioners, and limits the capacity to draw on the knowledge and experience of peers. Many supervisors and practitioners shy away from group supervision or, if they have to participate, they do so in a constrained way because of previous bad experiences. It is strongly suggested that supervisors and teams follow the process offered here closely, particularly as they build the habit of group supervision in their teams. This process is safe, well tested, refined, and avoids group dynamics where one or two people dominate.

The advisor role is central to the success of the group process. The advisor should be very active, checking in regularly with the facilitator about their sense of direction and effectiveness of what they are doing. Likewise, the facilitator should quickly draw on the advisor if they are feeling stuck or unsure.