

Ethical Issues in Supervision

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Learning outcomes

- Why ethics is important for supervision.
- Awareness of some of the ethical issues that might arise in supervision.
- Ethical frameworks and principles.
- The development of skills and ideas about supervising ethically.

Ethical supervision

- Identify the ethical issues that emerge in the course of conducting supervision.
- Recognise the presence of one or more ethical conflicts in a given supervision situation; and
- Summon the appropriate principles and standards that inform competent and ethically responsible supervision.

A tricky area....

“Of course, indifference can be tempting. More than that, it can be seductive. It is so much easier to look away. It is so much easier to avoid such rude interruptions to our work, our dreams, our hopes. It is after all, awkward, troublesome, to be involved in another person’s pain and despair. Yet for the person who is indifferent, his or her neighbours are of no consequence. And therefore their lives are meaningless.”

Wiesel (1999)

“And action is the only remedy to indifference, the most insidious danger of all.”

Wiesel (1986)

Other challenges

Ethical awareness

- Competing biases
 - Salience
 - Confirmation bias
 - Loss aversion
 - Beliefs about disclosure
 - Dissonance reduction

Ethical action

- Individual and group processes
- Conformity and resistance
- Context
- Power
- Emotion
- The role of social norms
- Organisational pressures
- Group/self identity

Ethical and legal issues

Ethical issues

- Privacy and confidentiality
- Boundary issues & multiple relationships
- Competence
- Protection of the public
- Evaluation and feedback
- Diversity

Legal issues

- It is wise to maintain strict confidentiality unless compelled by law to do otherwise (Scaife 2019)
- Vicarious liability: Someone is held responsible for the actions or omissions of another person.
- Due process: Right to be treated fairly, efficiently and competently.

Exercise 1

Small groups

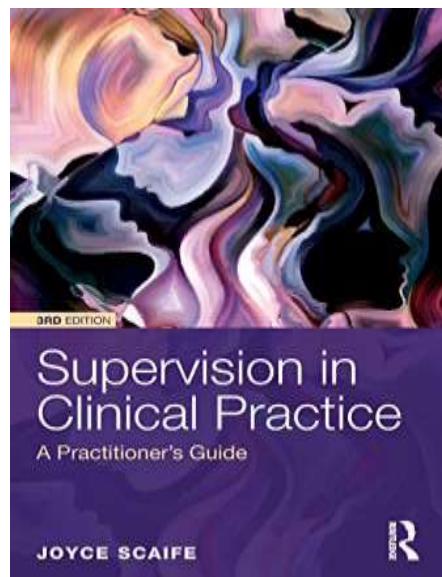
Consider an ethical issue that has emerged within supervision

- How did you respond?
- What happened?
- What helped?
- What did you learn?

Doing our best



“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” (Maya Angelou)



“All professionals make mistakes. What is important is that people do their best in the knowledge of principles of ethics, codes of conduct and legal precedents.” (Scaife 2019)

Ethical frameworks



An ethical framework is like scaffolding around action made up of moral philosophy, professional codes of behaviour, values inherent in the therapeutic models, personal ethics, the law & organisational context. (Bond, 2008)

Ethical principles

(Scaife, 2019)

- Offer a framework to consider ethical dilemmas that arise in supervision (within supervisory relationship/clinical work).
- To debate the best course of action.
- Offers assurance that decisions have been taken from an ethical standpoint.

Page and Wosket (1994)

- **Non-Maleficence:** Striving to prevent harm to others.
- **Fidelity:** Being faithful to promises made.
- **Justice:** Ensuring that people are treated fairly.
- **Beneficence:** Actions taken should do good, using knowledge to promote human welfare.
- **Autonomy:** Each individual has the right to freely choose their own course of action and to choose what happens to them.

AUTONOMY

Relevant to consent

Developmental model of supervision stresses increasing autonomy of supervisees as they become more experienced practitioners.

FIDELITY

For supervisors to think carefully about what they can reasonably promise supervisees during the contracting process.

BENEFICENCE

Considering the welfare of the supervisee, the client and involved others.

JUSTICE

‘Fair opportunity rule’

Supervisees are provided with sufficient assistance to overcome any disadvantaging conditions.

Non-Maleficence

Dilemmas can arise when clients make disclosures highlighting risk to others, however they are too frightened to report it.

Therapist/Supervisor has to decide who s/he must act to protect.

Guidelines & Codes

HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016)

BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2021)

BPS website: Race, Culture and Diversity

The Ten Essential Shared Capabilities for Mental Health Practice (2004)

Exercise 2

Case study

You are providing a placement for a trainee who has failed the previous placement due to serious concerns about their ability to engage with clients from different ethnic backgrounds to their own. The trainee has been on placement with you for several weeks and is still unable to engage with diversity.

How would you approach this?

Map to follow when an ethical dilemma arises

- Identify the problem or dilemma
- Identify the potential issues involved
- Review relevant ethical guidelines
- Discuss and consult with colleagues (including the course)
- Consider possible courses of action
- Enumerate the possible consequences of various decisions
- Decide what appears to be the best course of action

Final thoughts and questions

“The only reasonable approach for supervisors is to put ethics in the foreground of practice. Supervisors are then in a position to model what they aspire to teach.” (Bernard & Goodyear, 1998 taken from Scaife, 2019.)

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