

Supervising in groups

Kerrie Channer, Leeds

Catharine Kay, Sheffield

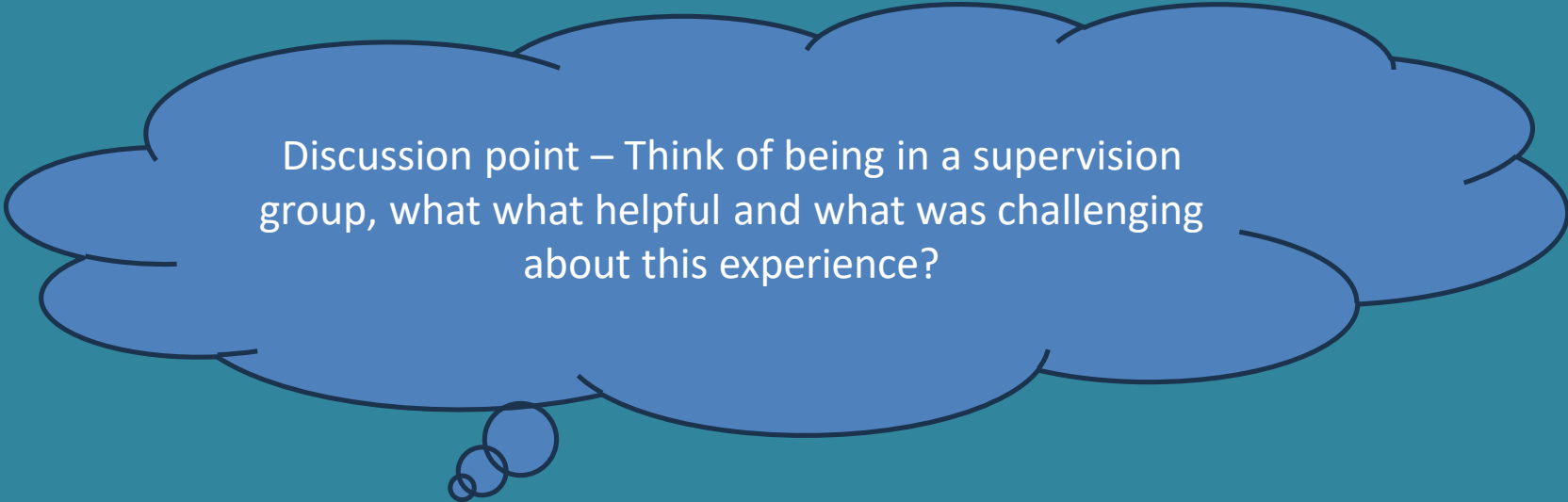
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Aims of the session

- ▶ To think about the practice of supervising groups
- ▶ To learn about and reflect on group theory and process
- ▶ To begin to explore the development of your group supervision skills through the use of vignettes

Supervising groups overview

- ▶ **Two broad areas that you will need to reflect on when setting up group supervision**
 - ▶ Creating the practical building blocks that help to support group learning
 - ▶ Your theoretical emphasis



Discussion point – Think of being in a supervision group, what was helpful and what was challenging about this experience?

The advantages of group supervision

- *'There are many advantages in the group format, both in terms of learning from the work of others and because the authority of the supervisor is more likely to be challenged. Different previous trainings, cultural perspectives and life experiences among the supervisees enrich discussions and benefit all, including the supervisor.'*

Ryle and Kerr (2002)

- Diversity of professional and cultural backgrounds, life stages and influencing personal history
- Supervisors task is to harness this diversity in the service of the supervisee and clients
- *'Many heads and hearts and better than one'*
(Blunden and Beard, chapter on CAT group supervision 2017)

The beginning

- What is the contract of the group/work – explicit and hidden agendas
- What is the organisational work - are people sent to you? Did they choose?
- What are the dynamics of the group?
- Do members like/have an interest in the model etc.?
- What are the anxieties of the supervisees?

Setting up and maintaining a group – Practical aspects

- Dynamic administration - Deciding when and where, time keeping
- Need for consistency
- Managing entries and exits
- Space and time for self to process
- Own supervision/ where can you take issues?

Setting up and maintaining a group - Contracting

- Leadership skills - taking responsibility for the group, negotiating boundaries and necessary task allocation
- Providing clarity about the focus of the group
- Skilled use of supervision frameworks

e.g. functions of supervision, normative, formative and restorative (Inskipp and Proctor 1993)

- Using a contract specifically designed for groups can be helpful (e.g. ACAT)

Setting up and maintaining a group – facilitator skills

- Managing feelings about changes in the group, beginning and endings
- ‘Checking in’ with the group
- Managing lateness and absences
- Managing tension between having knowledge to share and wanting the learning to be collaborative and shared by the group
- Managing when the group feels stuck
- Sharing the space
- Managing assessment tasks if this is your role

Group dynamics operate everywhere

- **Self in groups – Reflective exercise**
- **How alike we are? (bonding, connecting)**
- **How different are we? (splits & attacks)**
- **Idealisation/denigration of leaders**
- **Individual targeting (good or bad), scapegoating**
- **Group defences: pairing, flight/fight, up-down hierarchies**
- **Anti-group phenomena**

Development of group dynamics

- The development of a group
 - Forming, storming, norming, performing (originally Tuckman 1965)
 - Dilemma around the need for individuality vs finding belonging
 - Supervisors moving from 'expert' position to adult to adult group member

Similarities and differences in supervision groups

- Too much similarity = can feel stagnant, boring, overdependent
- Too much difference = risk of people feeling misunderstood, conflict, alienation
- Balance needed between the two
- We need to belong and feel understood but need to be open to learning from others and being creative too

Group Dynamics: Does size matter?

- ▶ Small
- ▶ Medium
- ▶ Large
- ▶ Very Large

Small Group – Therapy/Supervision Group

2-8:

- **Participation relatively easy**
- **'Family' dynamics can be observed**
- **Differences accentuated**
- **Can act as a container, providing barrier against the outside world**

Medium Group - Staff/Support Groups

9-20:

- Participation less easy than in small groups; formation of sub-groups.
- Sub-groups must form for the group to work.
- Individual differences are diluted and the links to the original family structures may get lost.
- Persecutory anxiety may arise.

Large Group - Workshops

20-70:

- Detachment may occur.
- Structure is necessary for the group to work.
- More difficult to keep a sense of belonging, contribute to the group, or find a suitable role.
- Emotions may be hard to manage and strong persecutory feelings may arise.

Very Large Group - Conferences

More than 70 people:

- Internet based/online groups (e.g. social media), wider society.
- Detachment & depersonalisation can occur.
- Even more difficult to keep a sense of belonging, contribute to the group or find a suitable role.
- Loss of personal boundaries, emotions may be hard to manage and strong persecutory feelings may arise.

Bion's Theory of Groups

- **Groups are difficult, provoking feelings of conscious and unconscious anxiety in group members.**
- **Defensive Behaviour may be generated to deal with anxiety.**
- **Groups frequently exhibit a 'group unconscious', manifesting itself in three different 'basic assumptions' which are not grounded in reality.**
- **In other words, the group behaves 'as if' one of three 'basic assumptions' were true when it is not**
- **But, If the group can stay in touch with reality, groups will get on with the task.**

Basic Assumption: Dependency

- ▶ **Members act as if they have no ideas/resources of their own**
- ▶ **may ask for guidance about how to do the task, denying own capabilities**
- ▶ **tend to lack initiative for action**
- ▶ **all power & authority invested in group leader**
- ▶ **expectation that leader will provide nourishment & protection**

Basic assumption: Fight or Flight

- ▶ **Assumption is created that group is meeting to fight something or run away from it**
- ▶ **Members blame external factors (lack of resources, other teams, management) for all that feels uncomfortable**
- ▶ **Fight or flight seems only way to achieve self preservation**
- ▶ **A leader is needed to direct the conflict**

Basic assumption: Pairing

- ▶ **Two members dominate in a group & appear encouraged by group to increase cohesiveness**
- ▶ **Unrealistic hope is invested in this pair that something new will emerge & someone/ something will help them get on with tasks**
- ▶ **There may be many new ideas but nothing is adopted or taken forward**
- ▶ **There may be a sense of hopefulness but no real change or action**

Basic Assumptions group versus Work Group

- ▶ Groups may move from one basic assumption to another
- ▶ Groups do not always become basic assumptions groups
- ▶ If the group is in touch with reality, groups will get on with the task

Vignettes/Group Discussions

Vignette 1

You are supervising a group of trainee clinical psychologists in an NHS setting.

You have noticed that when the supervisees present case material, they present it to you rather than to each other, and then look expectantly to you for a response.

Interaction between participants is focussed very much on deciding whose turn it will be to present next.

- ▶ What do you think is happening?
- ▶ What would you be thinking and/or feeling?
- ▶ What intervention(s) might you make?

Possible discussion points

- ▶ Bion's basic assumptions?
- ▶ Group in dependency mode.
- ▶ Might there be a level of distrust/envy/rivalry amongst supervisees that holds them back from engaging with each other's material?
- ▶ The supervisor could intervene by noting this is going on, and asking why people are working in this way, or could challenge the culture directly by inviting group members to comment on each other's work.
- ▶ There could also be parallel processes at work; the team might be working with highly dependent clients who look to their therapists for answers.

Vignette 2

You supervise a trainee who is running a group using CBT techniques to help people with anxiety related problems. Five out of the six members seem engaged, are always there on time, complete the exercises, and do their homework.

The sixth person is often late, sometimes misses sessions altogether, and never does his homework. Other group members seem critical of him, but don't say anything.

- ▶ What do you think is happening?
- ▶ What would you be thinking and/or feeling?
- ▶ What intervention(s) might you make?

Possible Discussion Points

- ▶ sixth member might be struggling, and this could be explored with them...
- ▶ But in a group, it is possible for one person to be on the receiving end of other's projections and behave accordingly - this man might be expressing resistance that others feel but don't express.
- ▶ A way forward might be wondering if other group members ever feel like not taking part to normalise this, and then exploring ways this individual/others might deal with resistance.

Vignette 3

In a supervision group that you are running a supervisee begins a session by saying she has experienced a family bereavement earlier in the week.

The supervisee says that, although she has carried on working, her heart and mind have not been in the job.

What do you do as supervisor?

- ▶ What do you think is happening?
- ▶ What would you be thinking and/or feeling?
- ▶ What intervention(s) might you make?

Possible Discussion Points

- ▶ Boundaries - need to hold them but not be too rigid.
- ▶ Supervision is not therapy, but can and should be supportive.
Depends on you as a supervisor how far you encourage exploration of this.
- ▶ Bear in mind that supervision is ultimately for client. The supervisor does have a "quality control" function and a responsibility to act if the service to client is not good enough.
- ▶ But then again wounded healers may make good healers...?