

Supervision policy, guidance and standards for Cafcass social work practitioners

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1. Overview

- 1.1 This document outlines Cafcass' policy on supervision, including guidance and practice standards for Cafcass social work practitioners. This policy and guidance has been separated from the guidance and policy relating to [performance and learning reviews](#) (PLRs) and from that related to the quality assurance framework.
- 1.2 Professional supervision for Cafcass social work practitioners is a requirement aimed at maintaining and improving the quality and impact of practice. This is for all Cafcass social work qualified practitioners regardless of experience or employment status. Effective supervision helps to prevent shortfalls in practice and judgement that can have devastating consequences for a child and the Cafcass social work practitioner.
- 1.3 Cafcass social work practitioners have access to high quality supervision with a manager/supervisor who is suitably qualified and competent to provide professional supervision. Supervisees understand what good supervision looks like and what they can expect. Both supervisors and supervisees are responsible for creating a psychologically safe space based on mutual respect and trust. This is essential for ensuring the right balance between support and challenge.
- 1.4 While there is a place for supporting compliance with policy and practice, the balance of supervision in Cafcass is in favour of reflection and learning. Supervision for new staff and those on practice improvement plans is regular and scheduled. While supervision is voluntary for experienced staff who achieve practice quality standards and perform consistently, there are mandatory 'triggers' for seeking supervision for all social work practitioners.
- 1.5 While supervision is distinct from management oversight (see appendix 1) they are interconnected and interdependent. Elements of supervision, such as case supervision with a manager in line with one of the triggers, lean into management oversight and management oversight can stimulate reflective supervision. Cafcass has adopted the 4x4x4 model of supervision for social workers.

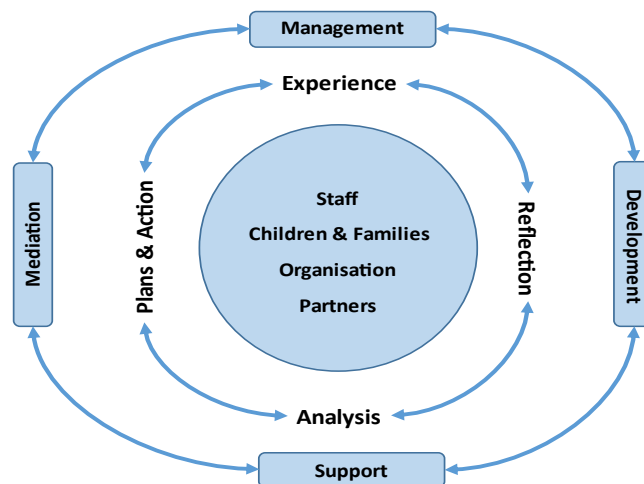
2. Core principles

- 2.1 The policy, guidance and standards apply to the supervision of all Cafcass social work practitioners in Cafcass, including Cafcass associates. They apply to all regardless of length of time in post or type of work being undertaken.
- 2.2 The guidance and standards are aligned with the core standards for the supervision of qualified and registered social workers (whatever their role) set out by Social Work

England (see appendix 2), Ofsted, the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) and the long-standing approach to the supervision of social work qualified family court advisers (FCAs) employed by Cafcass.

- 2.3 Supervision enables professional authority and discretion through accountability in the achievement of practice quality standards.
- 2.4 The policy, guidance and standards are aligned to the values of Together with children and families. Relationship-based supervision is a key component.
- 2.5 Effective supervision is built on mutual respect and trust, and balances support with challenge. It encourages reflection and creative solutions to complex and emotionally challenging situations that arise in working with families.
- 2.6 Critical reflection pays attention to the impact of the work or issues on the practitioner and how this, in turn, impacts on their approach, practice and judgement.
- 2.7 Factors of equality, diversity and inclusion that are relevant to both the supervisory relationship and the practitioner’s relationships with children and families, is explored in reflective supervision.
- 2.8 Effective supervision can prevent both over-optimism and risk-averse practice thereby reducing the harmful effect of both approaches on the child and families we work with.
- 2.9 The 4x4x4 model of supervision (Morrison, 2005) integrates the four functions of supervision with the four partners and the four stages of the supervision cycle (see section 3).
- 2.10 Case supervision is available at the point of need, requested by the supervisor or supervisee and required when certain circumstances arise. This is called ‘situational supervision’.
- 2.11 The practice quality standards relating to case supervision set out the circumstances in which practitioners are required to request situational supervision, how it should be recorded and how we will know what difference it is making.

Overview of the 4x4x4 Model of Supervision



3. The 4x4x4 model of supervision

3.1 The four functions of supervision and how these take place in Cafcass:

1. **The management function** is about competence and accountable performance. The Cafcass management oversight framework (**see appendix 1**) is integrated within this document. Situational supervision can arise from any of the components of the framework.
2. **The development function** is about supporting continuing professional development. Every conversation in supervision is an opportunity for learning and improving key skills. Everyone at Cafcass has a personal learning and development plan, agreed in their performance and learning review (PLR). Three learning priorities are selected from a) our whole service-learning plan, b) your personal practice/professional reflections and c) a priority drawn from the collaborative audit self-assessment. Learning and demonstrating learning in practice is at the heart of our career and qualification pathway for Cafcass social work practitioners. Please see the [Performance and Learning Review \(PLR\) Policy](#) for detailed information on carrying out a PLR.
3. **The support function** is about identifying and providing personal support. This support can be accessed at any time, at the point of need, and is an important discussion during the PLR, which occurs at a minimum three times per year for social work practitioners. The focus should be on helping the individual to understand their emotional experience with the aim of learning and using that understanding to develop their self-awareness and professional practice.
4. **The mediation function** is about supporting the individual to engage positively and constructively with the organisation, including encouraging the individual to bring challenge and solutions to organisational challenges. The Together framework unites us through a common set of values and ways of working. The application of these values and ways of working through supervision is a vital element of demonstrating the values in professional relationships.

3.2 The four stages of the supervision cycle:

1. Experience – engaging and observing – the story of what happened?
2. Reflection – investigating and experience – what was it like?
3. Analysis – seeking to understand – what does this mean for the child?
4. Action plans – preparing for action – what next?

3.3 The four groups who are impacted by supervision (partners or stakeholders):

1. Cafcass social work practitioners (FCAs, practice supervisors and managers)
2. Children and families
3. The organisation
4. Our partners (judiciary, local authorities, HMCTS and other partner organisations)

4. Case supervision and recording

4.1 Situational case supervision is responsive and voluntary in nature, for practitioners to check out their analysis and recommendation or to seek advice about legal, professional, or ethical dilemmas related to a case. Scheduled supervision takes place for new staff, those returning to work following prolonged absence and those subject to practice improvement plans.

4.2 Self-reflection and self-supervision is a process undertaken by experienced and competent Cafcass social work practitioners to prevent complacency and bad habits. These social workers know what is expected of them but are committed to testing

themselves against agreed practice quality standards and the values of Together – not waiting for managers or auditors to tell them. The self-assessment in advance of a PLR is an opportunity for self-reflection. FCAs are supported by the inclusion of a PowerBI dashboard tailored to them, accessible on Connect.

- 4.3 In addition to responsive and voluntary case supervision, there are circumstances and occasions where an FCA is required to request supervision with a practice supervisor or manager. These 'triggers' are as follows:
- a) Reunifying children with parents or family or friends in public law proceedings;
 - b) A case where it is proving difficult to decide what is in the best interests of the child;
 - c) A child where there is current harm or risk of harm and/or referral to a local authority or the police or a change of arrangements in public or private law may be appropriate
 - d) A decision not to see a child in person or in the agreed timescales set out in the seeing and engaging children policy and/or the child's plan;
 - e) A case outcome in court that does not accept the FCA's assessment of risk to the child and/or is considered by the FCA to be unsafe;
 - f) Learning initially identified in a significant incident review or an associated case and/or learning review.
 - g) Review of proceedings which are delayed or long running and the impact of this on the child.
- 4.4 Recording case supervision:
- Case supervision is recorded by the manager or practice supervisor on the dedicated supervision record in ChildFirst. The form provides for the four stages of the supervision cycle (experience, reflection, analysis and action) to be reflected in the record.
 - Actions are agreed between the supervisor and the supervisee, clearly noting what will be done, by whom, and by when.
 - Reflective supervision (which is centred on issues personal to the worker or broader themes which do not relate to a specific child or case supervision) are recorded on the PLR system as a general meeting record – not in the child's record.
 - A reflective supervision tool can be found in the [Together for children and family's workbook](#) on Connect.

5. The quality and impact of supervision

- 5.1 The impact of supervision is tested through the quality assurance and impact audits, which include feedback from children and families in a proportion of audits.
- 5.2 The frequency of practitioners accessing supervision in line with this policy is monitored as part of the spotlight report and via managers' and FCA dashboards.
- 5.3 Any themes or concerns arising regarding FCAs not accessing supervision as required are explored through reflective supervision requested by the manager/supervisor and followed up with a support plan if appropriate.
- 5.4 While the supervision cycle concludes with actions being agreed, it should not be undertaken or seen as a 'directive' activity. At its best it:
- ✓ explores intuitive responses and uses these appropriately to understand the child's situation;
 - ✓ identifies discrepancies and actively considers alternative perspectives;

- ✓ explores assumptions and identifies biases that could affect reasoning about the family;
- ✓ ensures the potential meaning of the information is fully explored and that analysis is informed by evidence from research and practice.

6. Group supervision and recording

- 6.1 Together group supervision should take place every month, all staff should attend at least one per quarter and a brief record of the session should be added to the PLR system via a general meeting record.
- 6.2 When recording information in relation to children this should be done as a follow-up discussion as one to one supervision, recorded on the supervision form in ChildFirst.
- 6.3 Teams will need at least two facilitators for group supervision. Larger teams may need to split sessions.
- 6.4 A model of group supervision, including case mapping can be found in the [Together workbook](#) on Connect.
- 6.5 The model reflects all the elements of Together, by asking questions around how casework has made a difference to a child (strengths), and in complex case work, how interventions or expert assessments have made (or will make) a difference to a child (impact).
- 6.6 Group supervision can also be used as a method of discussing a particular practice issue or new information, for example relating to domestic abuse or learning from Significant Incidents.

7. Practice observations and recording

- 7.1 Practice observations take place once in every 6-month period for all FCAs. The quality assurance and impact framework contains the forms for preparing and recording a practice observation.
- 7.2 Practice observations are selected based on being linked to the practice improvement priorities and can provide the basis for case and/or reflective supervision with appropriate recording.
- 7.3 Any agreed actions should be recorded on the practice observation form and learning should be discussed in the subsequent PLR.

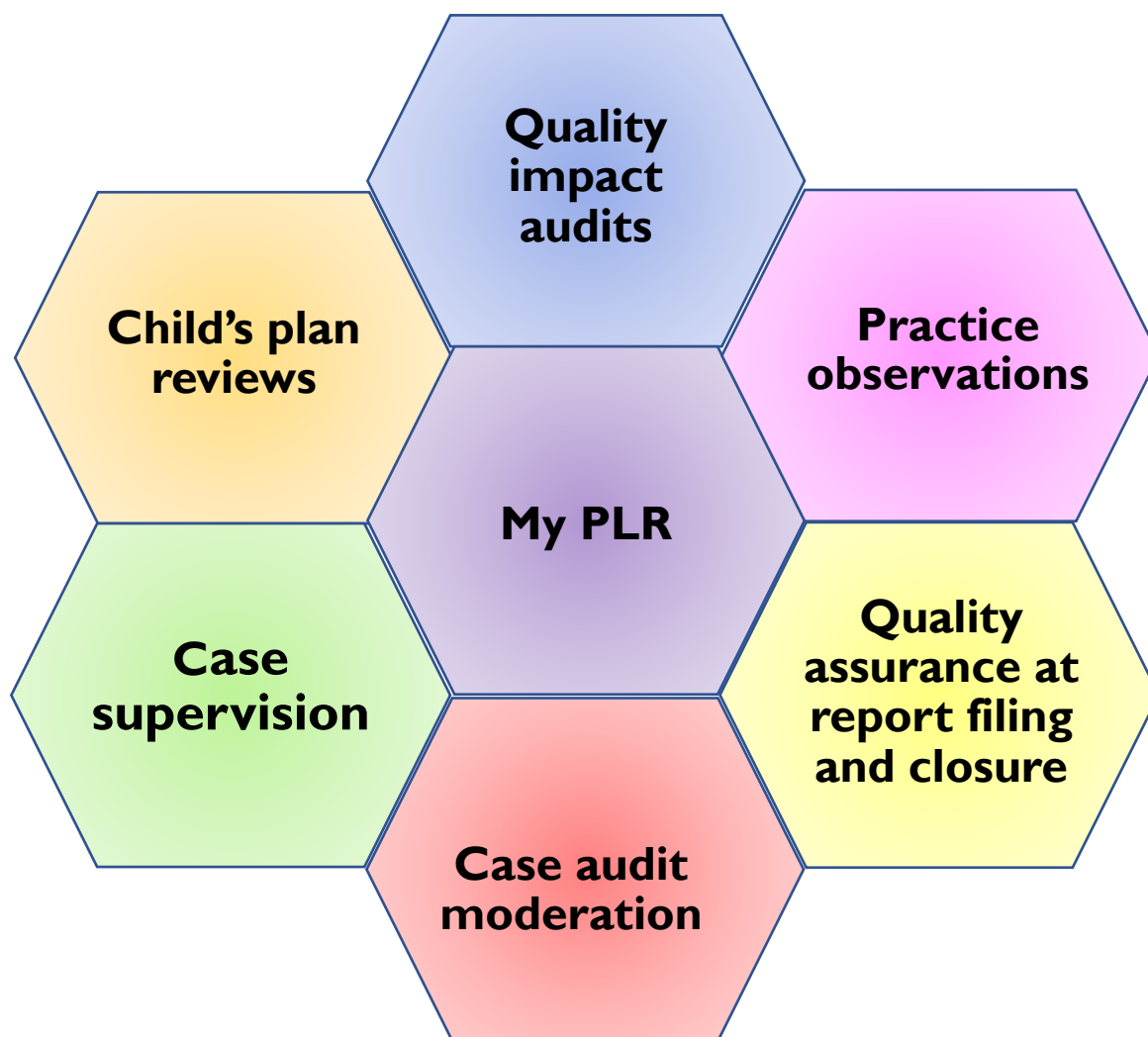
8. Supervision practice quality standards:

- Supervision is seen as a priority (SWE)
- Supervision is given dedicated space and time (Ofsted)
- Supervision is one-to-one, regular and planned (BASW)
- Supervision is regular and structured (SCIE)
- Supervision gives the supervisee a safe and confidential space (SCIE)
- Supervision is provided by suitably experienced and trained supervisors (SCIE)

	Standard
1	Supervision is held regularly and is uninterrupted.
2	Case and reflective supervision is triggered by the circumstances and occasions set out in this guidance for all FCAs.
3	Management oversight takes place through reviews of child's plan reviews, reviews of reports filed at court, review of cases at closure, QA&I case audits, practice observations, case audit moderations and through PLRs. Any of these can result in case or reflective supervision.
4	Group supervision should be attended at least once per quarter. It is a further tool for exploring practice and problem solving, utilising the expertise of practice specialists and peer colleagues, and facilitated by a confident practitioner, supervisor or manager with sound understanding of the model.
5	PLRs are held at a minimum three times per year and provide the focus for conversations relating to the personal support, development and mediation functions of supervision.
6	Following case supervision there is a section available to both parties on the child's file, which is recorded in a timely manner by the manager/supervisor.
7	Practice observations take place twice per year and provide the opportunity for both case and reflective supervision.
8.	Reflective supervisions are recorded on the PLR system as a general meeting record – not in the child's record.

Owned by	Sarah Parsons, Deputy Director
Approved by	Corporate Management Team
Approved on	15 March 2022
Implemented	1 April 2022
Version	3.10 Nov 2022
Amended	<p>Reviewed June 2022 and updated in line with the changes to the PLR system and updated Quality Assurance Framework.</p> <p>'A change of care plan or placement in public law proceedings' removed from triggers of supervision as previously agreed. Nikki Gardner.</p> <p>3.10 - 7.1 updated from twice a year to once in every 6 months</p>
Next review	June 2025

Appendix 1: Management oversight framework



Appendix 2: The standards for employers of social workers in England

Standard 5 – Supervision standards

The purpose of the supervision standard is to ensure that students, newly qualified and experienced social workers receive quality and regular supervision. Supervision should adhere to the post qualifying standard of the Knowledge and Skills Statement (KSS). The standards say all employers should:

1. Ensure that supervision takes place regularly and consistently and lasts for an uninterrupted duration of at least an hour and a half.
2. Make sure that supervision takes place:
 - for students on placement - as agreed with students and programme providers;
 - for newly qualified social workers – at least weekly for the first six weeks of employment of a newly qualified social worker, at least fortnightly for the duration of the first six months, and a minimum of monthly supervision thereafter;
 - for social workers who have demonstrated capability at ASYE level and above - in line with identified needs, and at least monthly.
3. Ensure that they have a policy in place which governs supervision, and which:
 - locates responsibility for that policy with the principal social worker or other appropriate senior manager.
 - requires the actual frequency and quality of supervision to be monitored against clear expectations.

In terms of the quality of supervision, all employers should:

1. Ensure that social work supervision is not treated as an isolated activity by incorporating it into the organisation's **social work accountability framework**.
2. Promote continuous learning and knowledge sharing through which social workers are encouraged to draw out learning points by reflecting on their own practice in the light of experiences of their peers.
3. Promote the use of supervision as an opportunity for social workers to critically reflect on, and identify their learning needs, using evidence, research and other social work frameworks where appropriate.
4. Actively use the regulator's professional standards as the basis for supervision, including evaluating capability and identifying development needs, ensuring that social workers are able to draw on and use additional resources such as the professional capabilities framework and knowledge and skills statements to develop their day-to-day practice and skills base.
5. Ensure that supervision supports students and qualified social workers to meet the regulator's professional standards.
6. Provide regular supervision training for social work supervisors.
7. Assign explicit responsibility for the oversight of appropriate supervision and for issues that arise through supervision.
8. Provide additional professional supervision by a registered social worker for practitioners whose line manager is not a social worker.

Appendix 3: Some examples of questions to use in supervision and to structure the conversation

- What did the child say?
- What did you observe?
- What did you find out? Where from?

Investigating the experience through reflection:

- What did you feel beforehand?
- What did you feel during the experience?
- What did you feel after the experience?
- How do you feel now?
- How did that emotional experience affect how you behaved? What you think?
- What assumptions did you make before you even went?
- What assumptions have you made now?
- What information can you see is missing?
- How do you think the child and/or their family feel? How do you know? What else might they be feeling?

Understanding the Experience through Analysis:

- What is your understanding of the child's lived experience now having had the opportunity to stop and reflect?
- What is your hypothesis about why the family is experiencing the difficulties that have led to professional involvement?
- What is your evidence?
- What are the discrepancies that refute the hypothesis?
- What research backs or refutes this?
- What don't we know?
- What are the alternative explanations?
- If your understanding is accurate what does this mean for the child?

What next:

Agreed actions that lead from the reflection and analysis should be clear, SMART and recorded with an explanation of how outcomes for the child and family will be improved as a result.