



Australian Counselling Association Inc - ABN 12 242 711 378

ACA Policy Document on Professional Supervision

Effective as of 1st of March 2013

The following outlines ACA policy in relation to Professional Supervision effective as of 1st of March 2013.

Preamble: What is Professional Supervision?

To ensure there is no confusion with terms in this document it is important to point out that Professional Supervision encompasses several subjects one being Clinical Supervision. Many therapists use the term Clinical Supervision as though it was interchangeable with Professional Supervision however they are not one in the same thing. Clinical Supervision is one component of Professional Supervision. For ease of reading this document will refer to Professional Supervision as “Supervision”.

There is a lot of discussion about supervision and the need for it however there seems to be a lot of confusion as to what supervision actually entails and why it is required. This document is intended to dispel any misconceptions as to what ACA defines as “Professional Supervision” and what are member obligations to ACA in relation to Supervision. All practicing full members of ACA (level 1 to 4), including supervisors, are required to undertake annual supervision to maintain their status as practicing members. Supervision is a mandatory requirement of most professional organisations and should be written into any contracts where a counsellor is employed. Counsellors in private practice are responsible for organising their own supervision. To facilitate this, a register of Supervisors can be found on the ACA web site. Registered ACA Supervisors belong to the ACA College of Supervisors and have met stringent entry criteria.

Supervision is the process whereby a counsellor can speak to someone who is trained to identify any behavioural and/or psychological changes in the counsellor that could be due to an inability to cope with issues of one or more clients. A supervisor is also responsible for challenging practices and informing supervisee’s of alternative theories and/or new practices, as well as changes in the industry. The supervisor is responsible for observing the mental health of their supervisee in turn protecting the public from poor practices. Counsellors can face issues such as transference and burn out without any recognition of the symptoms. A professional supervisor would notice the symptoms long before the counsellor. Supervision is a learned discipline separate from counselling.

Counselling skills such as advanced micro-skills are used as well as a solid base of knowledge on theories old and new and a working knowledge of the industry. Being a qualified counsellor does not automatically qualify anyone as being a competent supervisor. A supervisor needs to be able to see through the smoke screen thrown up by a counsellor who is having problems. The old adage that doctors make the worst patients is as valid for counsellors, counsellors are generally the last to acknowledge they are having emotional problems. A supervisor needs to be experienced and have

advanced communication skills to supervise effectively. A session in supervision will usually cover several aspects of counselling.

A supervisor will discuss recent sessions that a counsellor has given, paying attention to how and why the counsellor used particular theories and what the motives to challenging were. They will listen to detect if the counsellor had any agendas that were not the clients. They will also monitor and discuss many issues, some of these are:

1. Is the counsellor owning the clients issues?
2. Does the counsellor detach from their clients after sessions in a healthy way?
3. Is the counsellor dwelling on a client's issue
4. Is the counsellor getting the appropriate amount of sleep and rest.
5. Is the counsellor showing signs of burn out?
6. Are there signs of projection or transference?
7. Is the counsellor keeping on top of their administrative tasks.
8. Is the counsellor undertaking regular professional development/education.
9. Are the counsellors business building skills adequate.
10. Is the counsellors marketing material adequate and accurate.

A supervisor needs to check all these issues and more without being intrusive or threatening. The supervisor needs to respect counsellor-client confidentiality and adhere to the same ethical conditions as a counsellor.

Supervision is similar to counselling in as much as a counsellor should not receive formal counselling from a friend, colleague, relative or co-worker. Supervision should be on a contractual basis with agreed remuneration for services, supervision is a professional service therefore can be deemed a tax deductible service. Supervision does not need to be face to face, it can be conducted over the phone (or skype) or through the use of web technology just as effectively, particularly for counsellors in isolated geographical places.

Supervision Requirements by ACA

How many hours of Supervision per year are required: Each practicing member of ACA (level 1 to 4) whether they are in paid or unpaid (volunteer) employment must complete a minimum of 10 hours of Supervision per membership year. The ratio of supervision hours per client contact hours should be 1 hour of supervision for every 10 hours of client contact time. Counsellors in full time employment should receive supervision either internally or externally once a week where possible however not less than once a month.

Supervision undertaken by an ACA member must be delivered by either a "Registered Supervisor" or an ACA "Recognised Supervisor".

Peer Supervision: Members may participate in peer supervision however they can only claim a maximum of two hours of peer supervision per year as part of their 10 hour requirement.

Group Supervision: ACA defines Group Supervision as an organised and structured event that has a recognised leader who takes responsibility for the group. The leader must meet ACA Supervisor requirements. There should be a minimum of one ACA registered or recognised Supervisor for every 10 group participants. There are no minimum limits in relation to the 10 hour annual requirement.

One on One Supervision: This is possibly the most sort after and popular form of Supervision. This mode of supervision is as it suggests a coalition of a supervisor and a supervisee. One on one usually takes place in a face to face situation however it can also be conducted using the phone, skype and web.

What constitutes a “Registered Supervisor”: An ACA registered supervisor is an ACA member who is a current member of the ACA College of Supervisors. To verify whether a supervisor is in fact an ACA registered supervisor you can go the ACA Register on the ACA web site and conduct a search for supervisors or ring 1300784333 and an ACA staff member will help you.

What constitutes an ACA “Recognised Supervisor”: An ACA “recognised supervisor” is a supervisor who is not registered with the ACA College of Supervisors however meets the ACA “Supervisor” criteria.

ACA Supervisor Criteria: ACA has two criteria, to be able to offer supervision to an ACA member a Supervisor must meet one of the following criteria:

1. Registered with the ACA College of Supervisors; or
2. Be eligible for membership to ACA at a minimum of level 2 membership and
 - a. Have a minimum of 3 years post qualification counselling experience; plus
 - b. Have completed a minimum of 50 hours of post qualification Supervision; plus
 - c. Have completed a Supervisor training course that meets ACA standards; plus
 - d. Undergoes regular supervision as a Supervisor; plus
 - e. Be registered with a peak body similar to ACA as a counsellor and/or supervisor.

What constitutes an “ACA Supervisor Training Course”: Counselling supervision is an essential safeguard for clients, a support for counsellors, and a process through which practitioners can develop their skill and competence. A trained Counselling Supervisor should be able to conduct supervision sessions using various supervision interventions, provide effective evaluation and feedback to supervisee’s and address the ethical and legal considerations of supervision. An ACA Supervisor Training Course will facilitate the development of supervisory knowledge and skills for experienced counsellors and equip practitioners with the specialist knowledge and skills necessary to be an effective supervisor.

An ACA Supervisor Training Course will enable the learner as a minimum to:

Define the role of a clinical supervisor; Identify the goals of supervision; Discuss and apply theories and models of supervision; Describe the supervisory relationship; Demonstrate the skills required for conducting different supervision interventions; Provide effective evaluation and feedback to supervisees; Successfully undertake a variety of supervisor administration tasks; and Address ethical and legal considerations of supervision.

An ACA Supervisor Training Course will cover as a minimum:

- An Introduction to Clinical Supervision
- An overview of Clinical Supervision
- Models of Supervision
- The Supervisory Relationship
- Advanced Skills in Clinical Supervision
- Types of Supervision

- Evaluation and Feedback
- Supervisor Administration Skills
- Ethical and Legal Considerations
- Applying Supervision Skills
- Final Assessment

For a course in Supervision to meet ACA supervision standards it must meet **all** the following criteria as a minimum:

1. Must be delivered either face to face or a combination of face to face, online or distance training.
2. Must be run over a minimum of a 40 hour period with a minimum of 14 hours being face to face including the final assessment.
3. Final assessments must include as a minimum a live, in real time, 60 minute formally assessed Supervision session. This session is not to be role played or assessed via a recorded video or audio session.
4. All tutors/lecturers/assessors must be eligible for membership to the ACA College of Supervisors,

Workplace nominated Supervisor: NGO's, Churches and other similar employers may nominate a workplace supervisor who does not meet any of the ACA criteria. Although this is not the optimum situation for the employed counsellor ACA will accept supervision from work place nominated supervisors for the work undertaken by an ACA member whilst employed within the said agency. ACA recommends that members who find themselves in this situation seek out external supervision from an ACA recognised supervisor. Counselling work undertaken outside the agency will require an ACA recognised supervisor.

Professional Supervision – What's involved?

The following sets out a general framework of what constitutes Professional Supervision and also discusses some issues related to Supervision. First we will have a look at what Professional Supervision is not.

It is not:

- Someone watching over your shoulder whilst you practise.
- A discussion between two or more practitioners;
- Being supervised whilst on a field placement when completing your initial counselling qualification;
- Discussing personal matters with a counsellor.

Supervision is: A formal arrangement for counsellors to discuss their work regularly with someone who is experienced in counselling and supervision. The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficiency of the counsellor/client relationship. Professional supervision is a process to maintain adequate standards of counselling and a method of consultancy to widen the horizons of an experienced practitioner.

Counselling exposes counsellors to situations that impose a great demand on practitioners emotional and professional well-being. This demand can lead to becoming enmeshed and over-involved leading to ineffective practice. Counsellors **cannot in all cases be objective** about their own abilities, agendas and practices. A supervisor can be objective and help the counsellor to grow

and learn. The supervisor can ensure that the counsellor is meeting the needs of their clients and keeping to ethical and professional standards. Supervisors will also help counsellors relate practice to theory and visa versa. Supervisors are most likely to identify potential mental health issues in the Supervisee before they become a problem.

Professional Supervision is a contractual agreement made between a Supervisor and a Supervisee. Private or external supervision is usually a professional fee paying service or in an agency it can be part of the employment contract.

Who needs to have a Professional Supervisor?

- All ACA registered practising counsellors;
- Any person whose job has a large component that involves them dealing with people in crisis;
- Most professionals who work in the Human Services industry;
- Any other person who believes it would be advantageous;
- Professional Supervisors

How often do you need to have Professional Supervision?

- The recommended industry standard is one hour of supervision for every 10 hours of client contact time.

Who is not a Professional Supervisor?

- Anyone who does not meet the discussed criteria and have a qualification in supervision;
- Anyone who has a counselling qualification but not a qualification in supervision unless assessed differently;
- Seniority is not a qualification and on its own will not meet supervisor criteria.

What should a Supervision contract cover?

- Costs per session and any extras eg, STD phone calls;
- Session times;
- Amount of sessions per client contact time;
- Basic framework of sessions;
- Any journals and signing off procedures;
- Confidentiality;
- Reporting procedures for any occurrences that involve ethical and/or legal issues;
- Penalties for late cancellations.

What should a session consist of?

The supervisors' primary role is to ensure that their Supervisee's clients are receiving appropriate therapeutic counselling. By ensuring the counsellor continually develops their professional practice in all areas, the supervisor ensures a counsellor remains psychologically healthy. The supervisor is also responsible for detecting any symptoms of burn out, transference, hidden agendas etc in the supervisee. The four following topics need to be discussed in sessions over a period of time (this list is not exhaustive):

Evaluation:

- Supervisee's counselling;
- Developing process of self-review;
- Quality assurance;
- Best practice;
- Service outcomes of service delivery;
- Identifying risk for supervisee and clients;
- Referrals;
- Follow up on client progress;
- Helping the counsellor assess strengths and weaknesses.

Education:

- Establishing clear goals for further sessions;
- Providing resources;
- Modelling;
- Explaining the rationale behind a suggested intervention and visa versa;
- Professional development;
- Interpreting significant events in the therapy session;
- Convergent and divergent thinking;
- Use of self;
- Topping up;
- Facilitating peer connection;
- Duty of care;
- Legal responsibilities.

Administration:

- Procedures;
- Paperwork;
- Links;
- Accounting;
- Case planning;
- Record keeping;
- Insurance.

Support.

- Advocate;
- Challenge;
- Confront;
- Empower;
- Affirm;
- Availability;
- Empowering;
- Use of self.

Is supervision mandatory?

Yes if you wish to be recognised as an ACA registered counsellor and be placed on the ACA National Register.

Where do I find a Supervisor?

The best place to find a Supervisor who meets ACA criteria is on the ACA College of Supervisors register which can be found on the ACA web page.

Do I have to do face-to-face Supervision?

No, there are times when it can be advantageous to have a Supervisor who does not live close by or in the same community. Phone supervision is effective and if supplemented by videotape every now and then can be just as informative. Using the web can also be as effective if technology such as web cam is used.

What are the Supervisor's Responsibilities?

If a counsellor is sued and has been receiving supervision, the counsellor could then consider taking action against their supervisor. Therefore the supervisor's responsibilities continue beyond the session. It is the supervisor's responsibility to ensure any directions given during a session are followed for this reason. A supervisor who has many clients carries a lot of responsibility on their shoulders. For each supervisee the supervisor is responsible for the development and practice of the counsellor and by default a certain portion of the wellbeing of the clients, within reason.

What are the Counsellor's (Supervisee) responsibilities?

The supervisee is responsible for carrying through with any work or practices that are agreed upon in a session. Supervisees who pay lip service to supervisors cannot hold their supervisor responsible if things go wrong. It is also the supervisee's responsibility not to carry out any unethical practices that a poor supervisor may suggest. 'I was told to' is not a defence.

What is an impaired supervisor?

Unfortunately, being a supervisor does not necessarily mean a person is ethical or functional. There have been cases where impaired supervisors have justified improper practices by colluding with supervisees and passing on those improper practices to 'spawn' similar type practitioners. By building a group of impaired practitioners the supervisor can justify improper practices and by numbers convince others that it is appropriate. In some ways this is similar to forming a cult. Being a supervisee can put you in a vulnerable situation. If in doubt, seek help from your association or another supervisor. Any supervisor that advises you to breach any part of the code of practice should be reported to the association and another supervisor sought. Of all improper practices conducted by impaired supervisors, sexual exploitation is the most common. Sexual relationships with supervisors, supervisees, current or past clients are not acceptable and can lead to legal action and deregistration from professional bodies, even years after the event.

Is there anyone a supervisor should not supervise?

A supervisor should not supervise any person who they have had or are in an emotional or physical relationship currently or prior to a contract of supervision, or any member of their immediate family. The reason for this is that in any relationship a power base is established by those involved. This power base is generally functional for the personal relationship and is part of the dynamics for the decision-making processes within the relationship. It would be realistic to expect these dynamics to be carried across into a business/professional relationship, whether consciously or unconsciously. These dynamics would in most cases not be conducive to an objective and balanced

relationship between a supervisor and supervisee.

Is the Gender of the Supervisor important?

Gender can be an issue. A woman who has been brought up with an overbearing father may seek approval from a male supervisor. A male who has been brought up with an unemotional father may seek a male supervisor, assuming they will be unemotional as well. A counsellor needs to reflect on why they may have a preference for a gender because they may be going into supervision with an unidentified agenda. Counsellors who find they have a preference for a gender due to a previous unpleasant experience may need to consider whether they have dealt with the issue satisfactorily.

A female counsellor who has been a victim of domestic violence and may seek out a female supervisor because of power issues with males could also take these issues into their practice. In this scenario the counsellor needs to consider counselling in relation to that issue. A male counsellor who has been brought up by an abusive stepmother may seek a male supervisor so as not to put themselves in the position of being subordinate to a female. Again this counsellor needs to consider their agendas and dealing with the issue in therapy.

Is gender an issue for supervisors?

Yes, as it is for supervisees. Supervisors may use the supervisor/supervisee relationship to play out unresolved issues. A female supervisor from a feminist background may use the relationship to attempt to cause change in male clients. A male supervisor may have traditional ideas as to the roles of the sexes and use the relationship to stall careers of female clients. Female supervisors may over identify with female supervisees emotionally.

Male supervisors may encourage male supervisees only to deal cognitively with cases. All of these examples are inappropriate for supervisors. The conditioning of the supervisor may see them employing tactics to subvert supervisees without being conscious of their agendas. Supervisors need to be aware of the broader issues. There are obviously more considerations and points of discussion that need to be considered however space does not allow us to discuss them all. It is the supervisors and supervisees responsibility to research this subject further.

Accumulation of Supervision hours:

Professional Supervision is a process members go through for many reasons, one of them being to maintain consumer confidence in counsellors, primarily answer the age old question “who is counselling the counsellor”. ACA’s policy of all practicing members attending supervision on a regular basis per annum is our way of demonstrating to the consumer we have a system of checks and balances to maintain their confidence in ACA registered counsellors.

This is an annual process and one reason why it is conducted over a 12 month period is to allow Supervisors the ability to monitor their supervisee’s mental health over the 12 month period. We are all aware that as counsellors our own mental health and ability to function professionally can be impacted on by various internal and external events over a period of time. If a counsellor was to accumulate their 10 hours of Professional/Clinical Supervision in one or two sittings then this important purpose is negated. It is for this reason that ACA does not approve nor recommend that members endeavour to “knock over” their annual requirement in one or two sittings by attending a Supervision day or weekend workshop for this purpose.

ACA policy states that any Supervision process that goes over 2 hours ceases to be considered as Professional/Clinical Supervision, it is to then be considered as training only. Therefore regardless of the wording used in any marketing material, blocks of more than 2 hours will not be accepted as being Supervision for the purpose of meeting ACA's member annual requirement of a minimum of 10 hours supervision per membership year. As previously mentioned Supervision is a process that members are expected to undertake over a 12 month period therefore members are to show through their log books having undergone **regular** supervision over their annual membership period. No more than 1 hour per week will be counted towards meeting membership obligations by ACA with the exception of **one** maximum two hour period per month that may be conducted in a group situation at an ACA Member Association or Chapter meeting.

Blocks of greater than 2 hours will not be recognised and only one 2 hour session per month will be recognised. This policy has been enacted to ensure ACA members do not attend workshops or presentations under the belief they are able to accumulate bulk hours of supervision in one or two sittings. This would be contrary to the whole purpose of undergoing regular Supervision. Group supervision that is conducted outside of an ACA authorised Member Association or Chapter meeting must have no less than one Supervisor (who meets ACA requirements) per ten Supervisee's.

Policy in relation to Supervision hours accumulated during attendance at an ACA **formally recognised** Supervisor qualification course is formulated independently with the training provider as part of the approval process and noted on the course material. Course owners and/or individuals who falsely claim to be running an ACA approved training course will have disciplinary action taken against them.