

# SUPERVISION

in child and youth care practice

*Editors*

Grant **Charles**  
James **Freeman**  
Thom **Garfat**

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Grant Charles, James Freeman and Thom Garfat – *editors*

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# Introduction

Grant Charles, James Freeman and Thom Garfat

Together the editors of this book have decades of experience in the field – as practitioners, supervisors, directors, writers, teachers, trainers and need we go on? As we have progressed through this wonderful field we have all experienced supervision – good and not so good. In the end, we all became supervisors at some point in our careers – mostly with no training, little support and a lot of anxiety.

In many ways, this book is an outcome of our experiences. Given the limited training, education and, even, readings on how to be a supervisor or what it might look like in our field, we decided to share our thoughts, beliefs and experiences. We are joined in this endeavour by some of our colleagues who have had similar careers and with whom we share some common values and beliefs.

Our intention is to make available some of the current thinking in our field about Supervision in Child and Youth Care Practice. It is very much grounded in what has come to be called a ‘daily life events’ (DLE) approach and reflects our belief that supervision in our field should reflect the characteristics of the field. Thus, it is not about a typical sit-down, one hour meeting, although we recognise the value of such meetings at specific times. Instead we have placed an intentional focus on in-the-moment interactions in the working lifespace. It is about ‘being with’ practitioners in the everyday and helping them grow and develop in that context.

As noted by many of the authors in this book, supervision in our field has been a long-neglected area of practice. Speculations of why that is so range from the standard cry of ‘we just don’t have the time’ to the thought that organizations simply do not understand why a child and youth care practitioner would need, or benefit from, supervision. We think that it may also be because supervisors are unsure about what to do in supervision in whatever form it might take and this makes sense as most of us, before becoming supervisors, have seldom experienced effective supervision ourselves.

We begin this book with a chapter by Grant Charles, in which many skills of an effective child and youth care practitioner are explored regarding how these might connect to supervisory practices, followed by a chapter by Charles and Garfat on 'mattering' because we believe that practitioners need to experience themselves as mattering to the supervisor, colleagues, young people and the organization. Following this is a chapter by Garfat, Fulcher and Freeman, which makes clear how the characteristics of a DLE child and youth care approach might translate into supervisory practice. This is then followed by a chapter by Garfat and Charles which outlines a framework for Individual Development Plans for practitioners and a potential Supervision Cycle which shows how all of the foregoing might be integrated into an ongoing process.

Jack Phelan then outlines the stages of supervisors' and practitioners' levels of development and the potential interaction between them. John Digney invites us all to wonder about the possible role of humour in supervision. The next chapter by James Freeman outlines some thoughts, framed within a servant-leadership framework, on how we might inspire practitioners to inspire young people.

We follow these chapters with some special reflections on supervision. Grant Charles and Carla Alexander offer thoughts on the supervision of students and Hailey Kavanagh shares some of her experiences as a student supervisee. Kiaras Gharabaghi then challenges our traditional approaches to 'supervision' and reflects on the value of having an external supervisor who is not bound up in traditional agency reporting systems. Finally, Frank Delano points us towards a new issue and opportunity in our field, the supervision of people identified as millennials.

This book also includes a study guide which will prove helpful to those desiring prompts for deeper reflection, discussion, and application of the principles in each chapter. It is designed for both individuals or group as well as use in academic study.

Supervision is a right of the practitioner. We believe that they have the right to the support, guidance and learning which is inherent in effective supervision. Child and youth care practitioners do difficult and challenging work in difficult and frequently challenging contexts. To be effective in their work they need the support, recognition and even the sensitive containment which comes with effective supervision.

When we provide effective, developmental, practice-focused supervision we do a service to the young people themselves for, as it has been argued many times, practitioners tend to do what they experience and effective supervision translates directly into a higher quality of service for young people and their families. We also do a service to practitioners when we support them to be the best that they can be. They, like all people, deserve the opportunity to achieve their potential and effective supervision can help them do so. It follows, then, that an organization which wishes to provide the best service possible to young people and families, will support the development of effective supervisors.



## 2

# Supervision: A matter of mattering

Grant Charles and Thom Garfat

Every one of us needs to feel that that we make a difference in the world (Charles & Alexander, 2014). We need to know that people know that we exist. We need to have people acknowledge, to us, that we are important to them. We need to know that we can rely on people to help us find meaning in our lives. It is critical to our growth and development as human beings to know that we matter. This holds true in our personal life. It is also true in our professional life. We need to know that the work we do is important, valued and meaningful. We need to know to that that we matter. This chapter will examine the expression of mattering as an important component of supervision.

Mattering involves helping the practitioner realize and accept that they are an important part of things within the work setting and that their contribution makes a difference. Part of the role of a supervisor is to help practitioners know they matter. While it is okay to have common expressions of mattering applicable to each practitioner, some must be individualized to each person based upon the meaning they place on what you are doing or saying based on variables such as gender, ethnicity and age. Not all expressions of mattering will have the same meaning for all people. Generally, though there are three aspects of mattering that need to be addressed for people to begin to realize that they matter to you as their supervisor. They are asking themselves, in their interactions with you, whether consciously or not, the following questions:

1. Do you see me?
2. Do you hear me?
3. Do you care about me?

With these questions in mind it becomes relatively easy to begin to purposely demonstrate to people that they matter to you. It is *relatively* easy rather than *simply* easy because whether they accept the messages of mattering is quite dependent upon their internal sense of worth, their past experiences of invalidation, exploitation and dehumanization, their past experiences with people in authority and the environment in which they work. You may have to overcome a powerful internalized belief that they do not matter.

For example, a practitioner who has a history of childhood sexual abuse where they were exploited by a significant adult in their life will have been taught that they mattered only as a sex object to the abuser. They may have incorporated into their self-image a sense that they matter little as a person. Through the invalidation of the abuse they may have developed a deep sense of shame. While they may have a deep passion as a practitioner to ensure that no young person has the experiences that they had as a child and know strongly that this mission matters, they themselves may deeply believe that they don't matter as a person.

In another case the person may have been a young carer who spent their childhood providing caregiving to a parent with a substance misuse issue. They may have spent years caregiving the adult at the expense of getting their needs met. The role reversal that can be associated with being a young carer means that while they have a sense of self-worth they may also believe that they only matter if other people get their needs met first. They have been 'trained' to put themselves after other people and feel they only matter if they are sacrificing themselves to meet the needs of others.

Another person may have a positive sense of their self-worth but have had negative experiences with previous supervisors. They may have had a supervisor who lied to them or manipulated them. They may have had a supervisor who put their own needs first or used the practitioner simply to their own ends. In other cases, the practitioner may have worked in an oppressive work environment where they had been invalidated and disrespected.

In each of these cases (and countless others like them) expressions of mattering by the supervisor could quite possibly be ignored, minimized, disregarded or treated with a great deal of mistrust and suspicion. This means it will take a great deal of mindful and thoughtful action on the part of the supervisor to counteract the past experiences of the practitioners. It

will require that the supervisor will have to become an expert at expressing ‘mattering’ but will also have to work hard at creating a culture of caring within the team and the program. The goal of the creation of this culture would be to build an environment where it would be safe for the practitioners to feel that they matter. This takes time and effort but supervisors should be doing this anyway for the benefit of the young people in their care. The creation of this type of environment benefits everyone – young people, families, practitioners and the supervisor.

Keeping in mind the three questions that must be answered in the positive for someone to believe they matter, the interactions of supervisor with each practitioner should focus on actions that provide proof of the affirmative answering of the questions.

### **Do you see me?**

There are any number of ways by which a supervisor can show practitioners that they matter through showing them that you ‘see’ their efforts and actions. Some are as simple as noticing and acknowledging in the moment, both publically and privately, the good work done with a young person or family. It can be about big or small actions but, regardless, the acknowledgement should be specific. For example, rather than saying “good job” the supervisor could say something like “I really liked the way you helped defuse that crisis by providing the young person with an alternative way of interpreting what just happened”.

Other ways of ‘seeing’ people could involve acknowledging at a team meeting something they have done well. You could have a ‘successes’ component at the beginning of team meetings where you congratulate people on a job well done. These could be related to change goals you have set for the program. For example, if you are trying to improve the relationship between the team and outside professionals you might commend a practitioner for the manner in which they greeted a child protection worker who had come to the program for a meeting. However, the acknowledgments don’t need to have themes. They can be about any accomplishment. It could involve successes with young people or with other systems. The only criteria is that they have to be genuine.

‘Seeing’ involves creating a culture of acknowledgement within the team. It is best to include in this culture an acknowledgement of the struggles practitioners may be having at work. This is a strong message of mattering

# Supervision and servant leadership

James Freeman

A relational child and youth care approach shapes our practice with young people and families by identifying unique ways of being, interpreting and doing (Freeman and Garfat, 2014). Supervisors can shape their approach around these same characteristics.

*“... supervisors who engage in real parallel practice, where the approach to, and form of, supervision models the approach and form of effective practice, help their staff to learn that approach. So, whatever your approach to child and youth care practice is, wouldn't it just make sense that your approach to supervision should be the same? For example, if you believe in the utilization of everyday life events as they are occurring, then this would have certain implications for supervision in your program. It would mean, for example, that the supervisor would need to be present when the child and youth care worker was intervening with youth. It might also mean that supervisory interventions are short and focused on the immediate.” (Garfat, 2001, p. 4)*

This concept of parallel practice (see, for example, Michael, 2005) can be empowering and freeing to supervisors. It is empowering because, with all the new and challenging tasks required of a supervisor, he or she builds on and expands prior experiences rather than discarding and learning an entirely new theory. Relational child and youth care practice provides a foundation for success as a supervisor. In a recent meeting with child and youth care supervisors where we discussed the characteristics of relational supervision, they shared some of the most common characteristics that informed and strengthened their supervision practice which were ‘counseling on the go’, ‘rhythmicity’, ‘being emotionally present’ and ‘doing with, not for or to’. A supervisor’s interactions with practitioners “can be an

opportunity to help workers learn about the ‘doing’ of their work through experiencing a similar process in the relationship with their supervisor” (Garfat, 2001, p. 4). What we know is helpful in our practice of caring also informs our practice of supervision and makes us more effective as supervisors (see Charles, 2016).

## **Providing a Different Experience**

Throughout my career I’ve found myself supervising individuals who have been either mistreated or oppressed in some way by their previous supervisor. I see signs of it when someone is hesitant to ask for time off work because they were made to feel guilty by a previous supervisor or in those who are overly fearful of taking risks, asking for feedback, or admitting mistakes because they have been humiliated or disrespected by someone who should have supported them and promoted their personal growth. These practitioners may or may not have experienced relational trauma in their personal lives, but they have been affected by coercive or intimidating relationships with a prior supervisor or manager in ways that affect subsequent supervisory relationships.

Working with these ‘recovering practitioners’ mirrors our work with young people who have been mistreated by those who were supposed to care for them. What many have missed out on are experiences of being treated with dignity, respect, and kindness from their supervisor. Some have not had prior opportunities to build trust in a working relationship with a supervisor. Our role becomes one of offering a different experience than they had had in prior relational encounters - the same task we have with children and youth our care – for them to have a different experience of self in relation with significant others. Supervisors have the power to influence and shape these new encounters in ways that promote the growth of the individual and create a model for them to apply in their own work alongside children, youth, and families. When we think about creating experiences such as relational safety (Garfat, 2015) for a child or family member, we can’t expect a practitioner to do so unless they have experienced such a thing themselves. I’ve found that creating and providing these experiences is a foundational task of the supervisor.

# About the Authors

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**JAMES FREEMAN, MA, CYC-P**, has worked with marginalized children and families for over 25 years in a variety of practice settings, including out-of-school, family camping, international sports, and residential and community-based programs. He holds a Master's degree in organizational leadership and is the Director of the Training Institute at Casa Pacifica Centers for Children and Families. He has served on the boards of the Association of Children's Residential Centers, the Child and Youth Care Certification Board, and the International Child and Youth Care Network where he is Editor of CYC-Net ([www.cyc-net.org](http://www.cyc-net.org)). He has trained child and youth care workers across the United States and Canada as well as in South Africa, Eastern Europe, Scotland, and Australia. He lives in southern

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**KIARAS GHARABAGHI, PhD**, has been involved in the field of child and youth care for the past 30 years, with particularly lengthy involvements in child and youth mental health, child welfare and youth homelessness. He spent 15 years in supervisory and management positions particularly in the context of residential care and treatment. For the past ten years, Kiaras has focused on research and on engaging the core concepts and ideas of child and youth care practice in local, national and global contexts. He is currently the Director of the School of Child and Youth Care at Ryerson University in Toronto.

**HAILEY KAVANAGH, BA**, is a graduate student in the Master’s program of the School of Child and Youth Care at Ryerson University. She is currently discovering the limitless possibilities in this field and is excited to continue her journey of becoming, enjoying every moment along the way. One of Hailey’s core interests in the field of child and youth care is the role of young people’s voice and their participation in the services, decisions and political agendas that impact their lives. At the moment, Hailey is particularly engaged with the residential services sector in Ontario, but as she continues to explore this interest, she wants to engage issues of voice, participation and system design globally. While residential services are at the heart of her interest now, she anticipates that community-based services, and services delivered through health care, education and other sectors, will



increasingly become absorbed into her focus of research, writing and advocacy work. Over the course of her studies at Ryerson, Hailey's identity has changed from being a hard-working student to becoming a rebel seeking to revolutionize the way we are with young people facing adversity.

**JACK PHELAN, MA**, has been a CYC practitioner for many years, as a front line worker, a supervisor, an administrator, trainer, faculty member, and a professional association board member. He is a Certified CYC practitioner and has travelled around the CYC world to connect with professionals in many countries. He has been involved with developing CYC supervisors through direct training and writing and views supervision as the most important dynamic in creating effective CYC programs. He teaches at MacEwan University in Edmonton and is a regular contributor to *CYC-Online*.

# SUPERVISION

## in child and youth care practice

*This book is a must-read for all child and youth care workers and their supervisors and is a great reminder that by investing in our youth care workers we are investing in our youth.*

Kelsie Tatum, Psy.D. – Residential Treatment Center Clinical Program  
Manager, Casa Pacifica Centers for Children & Families

*Supervision in Child and Youth Care Practice revisits the need for practitioners to experience a supervisor who is skilled and self-aware to contain them through the highs and lows we share with the kids, avoiding blame and defensiveness. A fabulous contribution to the field.*

Jill Neilson, Managing Director, A Life Explored (Care) Ltd

**GRANT CHARLES, PhD, RSW** is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at the University of British Columbia and Affiliated Associate Professor with the Division of Adolescent Health and Medicine in the Department of Pediatrics at the British Columbia Children's Hospital. He is a past editor of *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*.

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