

SUPERVISION

in Child and Youth Care Practice

2nd Edition

Editors

Grant Charles, James Freeman, Thom Garfat

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Introduction

Grant Charles, James Freeman and Thom Garfat

The three of us have decades of experience in the field – as practitioners, supervisors, directors, writers, educators, trainers and consultants. Between us we have worked in every conceivable type of child and youth care setting. We have had effective and ineffective supervisors and been both ourselves. We remember the challenges, fears and struggles of becoming supervisors. We also remember the joy as supervisors of helping people grow to become the best child and youth care workers that they could be. It is wonderful, although sometimes quite difficult, to be on a journey with staff to learn to provide young people and families with the right services at the right moment to be who they can be in their lives. This book is an outcome of our experiences.

Our intention is to make available the current thinking about supervision in our field. The book reflects our belief that supervision in child and youth care should reflect the characteristics of the field. As such, 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.

While there is increasing attention to it in recent years, supervision in our field has been a long-neglected area of practice. A goal of the first edition of this book was to help fill gap. We believe we were successful in that regard although also recognize that the field would benefit from an updating on the thinking about supervision. Thus, this second edition.

The book contains a combination of new and updated chapters. It also contains reprints of two chapters we believe continue to be important. We begin this book with a chapter by Grant Charles and Thom Garfat that explores the importance of “mattering” to the well-being of people associated with our field. They believe that practitioners need to experience themselves as mattering to the supervisor, colleagues, young people and the

organization. This is followed by a chapter by Michelle Holbrook, Andraya MacMillan, Mairi Macintyre and Ron Smith that explores the need for supervisors to be in the moment with staff as they work with young people and families. They make the point that to build the type of relationship and connection with staff that is effective, supervisors need to lead with intention and can best to do in the life space.

The third chapter by Grant Charles looks at how new supervisors can use their skills, attitudes and values developed as practitioners in their new role. The next chapter is a reprint from the first edition of Jack Phelan's work which outlines the stages of supervisors' and practitioner' levels of development and the potential interaction between them. We believe this chapter to contain critical knowledge needed by new supervisors as they transition into their new roles. James Freeman and Kelsie Tatum Martinez then in their chapter discuss a core foundational belief of the purpose of supervisor that moves beyond administrative functions to a critical way on interacting as a supervisor that promotes the development of environments of respect, safety, and growth that ripple outward to strengthen staff, build trust, and improve care for young people and families.

James Freeman and Toné Reyes then examine the unspoken realities of becoming a new supervisor. They point out that the shift from practitioner to supervisor changes more than responsibilities as it begins to reshape your sense of identity and place within the organization. They explore the gap between where you were, and where you're going, and how it can initially feel overwhelming and lonely. Next is a chapter by Thom Garfat, Leon Fulcher and James 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 from Thom Garfat and Grant Charles which outlines a framework for Individual Development Plans for practitioners and a potential Supervision Cycle which shows how all the foregoing might be integrated into an ongoing process.

In their chapter Virginia Hervey and Pennie Sibbald promote the importance of building reflective and reflexive capacity in our supervisory journey. John Digney invites us all to wonder about the possible role of humour in supervision. The book concludes with a reprint from the first edition of the chapter by Kiaras Gharabaghi. With a new preface, he 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.

We believe supervision is both a necessity and the right of the practitioner. 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 provide a service to young people and families for, as it has been argued many times, practitioners tend to do what they experience. As is often pointed out in this book, effective supervision translates directly into a higher quality of service for young people and their families. We also provide 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 that an organization wishing to provide the best service possible to young people and families will support the development of effective supervisors.

1. Mattering: The Core of Supervision

Grant Charles and Thom Garfat

Mattering is based on the premise that everyone needs to feel like we make a difference in the world. We need to know that people know that we exist. We need to have people acknowledge, to us and others, that we are important to them. We need to know that we can rely on people to help us find purpose and meaning in our lives. It is essential to our growth and development to know that we matter. This holds true both in our personal and professional life. We need to know that the work we do is important, valued and meaningful. We need to know that we matter. This chapter will examine the expression of mattering as a critical component of supervision.

Mattering involves helping people realize and accept that they are an important part of 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 four aspects of mattering that must 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?
4. Do you let me care about you?

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 on their internal sense of worth, their past experiences of validation, invalidation, exploitation and dehumanization, their past experiences with those people in authority and the environment in which they work. You may have to overcome a powerful internalized belief that they do not matter before they begin to accept that you matter to them.

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 and dehumanization 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 have never mattered as a person. They may know logically that they matter but never have an internal sense of this being true. *Their past experiences, rather than their current ones, dictate how they see themselves.*

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 providing care to the adult at the expense of having their own needs being met. The role reversal that can be associated with being a young caregiver means that while they have a sense of self-worth, they may also believe that they only matter if other people have 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, manipulated them or exploited them. They may have had a supervisor who 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, disrespected or been told directly or indirectly that their needs do not matter.

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 the supervisors should also be doing this anyway for the benefit of the young people in their care. In the end the creation of this type of environment benefits everyone – young people, families, practitioners and the supervisor.

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

Do you see me?

There are many ways 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 publicly and privately, the good work done with a young person or family. It can 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 are that they must 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 to people in that you are noticing that they are having difficulties. An important component of this form of expressing mattering is to take the time to help the person learn new skills. By this statement of standing by in word and action you provide a strong message that you believe that they are important enough for you to invest your time with them.

Another way of 'seeing' is through small gestures of appreciation such as giving a practitioner a card thanking them for something they have done. It may involve simply saying thank you, privately or publicly, to them for going the extra mile with a young person. Finally, it is important that you show appreciation for the support that a practitioner gives to you in your role.

Do you hear me?

'Hearing' as a form of expression of mattering involves acknowledging in any number of ways that you have heard what the person is saying. It involves listening with interest and intent. For example, it may mean that when there is a question to be answered, you take the time to be in the moment with the practitioner and not rush to a solution. It can involve answering a question they ask and then checking with them to make sure you answered the question they asked. *'Hearing' is a form of being fully present.* It can also involve simply remembering and asking about something the practitioner has said they were going to do. This might be that they were going out for dinner with a friend, going to talk to a co-worker about an issue they had during a recent exchange between them or following up to see if they read an article they had said they were going to read. While it can be about large issues, it is just as strong a statement to 'hear' the small things to show that they matter to you. In the case of mattering, it is a powerful statement about how much they matter to you if you do 'sweat the small stuff' about them.

'Hearing' also involves promoting situations where they can have 'voice'. This may involve practicing with them a presentation they may be about to

Contributors

Grant Charles, PhD is Associate Professor in the School of Social Work and Affiliated Associate Professor with the Division of Adolescent Health and Medicine in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of British Columbia. He holds an adjunct position in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria where he also graduated with his doctoral degree. Prior to coming to the UBC, he worked in a variety of mental health, special education and child welfare settings. He also taught in the Child and Youth Care Program at Lethbridge Community College.

John Digney, PhD. Since achieving his degree in Psychology in 1991 John has worked with children and families in various capacities. He has worked as a frontline practitioner, clinician, manager, researcher and lecturer. John has professional qualifications in Management, Project Management, Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. Having presented at over 50 conferences, he has authored and co-authored over 60 articles and a number of books, including *The Therapeutic Use of Humour*, *Relational Weaving*, *The Relational Thread* (with Dr Heather Modlin) and *Making Moments Meaningful* (with Drs Thom Garfat and Lean Fulcher). In addition to his 'day job' (Training and Learning Coordinator with Tusla, Ireland's Child and Family Agency) John provides consultancy and training worldwide and organises the annual Unity Conference in Dublin.

James Freeman, MA, CYC-P has over 30 years of experience in the Child and Youth Care field, spanning direct care to senior leadership. He is the past president of the Child and Youth Care Certification Board, a volunteer editor for CYC-Net and has presented and trained practitioners around the world. For more information visit www.training-grounds.net

Leon Fulcher, PhD has worked for more than fifty years as a social worker in residential child and youth care and foster care in various parts of the world. Leon has specialized in working across cultures and geographies, team working and caring for caregivers, as well as supervision and promoting learning with adult carers.

Thom Garfat, C.M., PhD is an international consultant and trainer who, for over forty years, has worked with children, young people, care givers and those who help them. His primary focus is on ‘making it work’, finding practical day-to-day ways to enhance the process of development and healing for young people and families. Thom was admitted to the Order of Canada in 2023 for his pioneering work with traumatized young people.

Kiaras Gharabaghi, PhD has been involved in the field of child and youth care for the past 40 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 twenty plus 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 Dean of the Faculty of Community Services at Toronto Metropolitan University.

Virginia Hervey, MA, RSW is a Senior Director at Hull Services in Calgary, Alberta, where she has led strategic initiatives in child and youth mental health for over a decade. With a background in Social Work and Child and Youth Care, she has a deep commitment to trauma-informed, anti-oppressive, and culturally responsive practices, Virginia integrates prevention and intervention strategies to support children, families, and communities. She is a respected mentor, collaborator, and advocate for including lived experience voices and Indigenous ways of knowing, and brings a systems-focused, community-oriented lens to her leadership and writing.

Michelle Holbrook is a Child and Youth Care (CYC) professional and Executive Director of Sarnia-Lambton Rebound, an organization committed to empowering youth through innovative programs and support. With over two decades of experience in the field, Michelle is passionate about fostering resilience, growth, and well-being in young people. Michelle prioritizes collaboration, relational practice and youth engagement to support youth success.

Mairi Macintyre is a Community Support Team Manager at Sarnia-Lambton Rebound in Sarnia, Ontario. She has worked in the helping profession for 14 years and holds a degree in psychology as well as a diploma in child and youth care. This is her first time writing for a book, drawing on her frontline and leadership experience to explore relational supervision in practice.

Andraya MacMillan is the Programs and Development Manager at Sarnia-Lambton Rebound and has spent 24 years supporting youth in her community. She brings a relational, reflective approach to supervision, grounded in connection, care, and the belief that relationships are central to effective practice. She is deeply committed to relational practice and to creating spaces where connection, reflection, and shared learning support both youth and the practitioners who walk alongside them.

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 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 taught for many years at MacEwan University in Edmonton. He is a regular contributor to *CYC-Online*.

Tone Reyes is a Program Advisor for the California Alliance of Child and Family Services/Catalyst Center. Tone brings has 30 years of direct care and leadership experience working in community programs, mental health, and substance abuse services systems in both the non-profit and private sectors. and community programs. His work includes training and development and has held roles at the supervisory and director-level in group homes and Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs. Throughout his professional journey as a leader, trainer, and mentor, his compassion towards young people and their families has allowed for a relational care approach and traumatic-informed delivery of services.

Pennie Sibbald, MSc CYC, CCYCC, Adult Ed. With over 35 years of experience in Child and Youth Care, Pennie has dedicated her career to supporting children and families and fostering professional growth and excellence in the field. As a Coordinator for the Learning and Development Department at Hull Services in Calgary, Alberta, she and her team develop and deliver training and curriculum for direct care practitioners within Hull Services and across external partner organizations. In addition to her role at Hull Services, Pennie actively contributes to her profession as a member of the Board of the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta and Chair of the Advanced Practice Committee, President of the Council of Canadian Child and Youth Care Associations, and Vice-President of FICE-Canada.

Ron Smith is the School-Based Team Supervisor at Sarnia-Lambton Rebound and a professor in the Child and Youth Care program at Lambton College. Ron's practice and teaching are grounded in a relational approach that emphasizes connection, accountability, and growth. Additionally, Ron is a trainer in Daily Life Events (DLE), supporting staff to intentionally use everyday interactions as opportunities for learning, relationship building, and growth.

Dr. Kelsie Tatum Martinez is a licensed psychologist with 20 years of experience supporting youth and families impacted by complex trauma and significant unmet needs. She earned her bachelor's degree in psychology and education from Occidental College and her doctorate in Clinical Psychology from Baylor University. Dr. Tatum Martinez began her career as an adolescent residential treatment therapist at a non-profit community organization where she later served in multiple leadership roles. She is an experienced supervisor, mentor, and trainer, specializing in clinical supervision and trauma-responsive care and intervention. She now serves in leadership at the Catalyst Center, where she provides training, technical assistance, and advocacy to strengthen systems of care and improve services for youth and their families. Her work is grounded in relational supervision, reflective practice, and the belief that healing happens through connection.

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