

## *What does ‘good’ professional supervision look like?*

### **Some thoughts from experienced supervisors**

Professional supervision is increasingly considered vital for mediators and other dispute resolution practitioners. Many mediators though, are new to professional supervision. We asked experienced mediators and professional supervisors what ‘good’ professional supervision looks like. Here are some of their thoughts.

### **What should you expect to get out of professional supervision?**

#### ***Carol and Gerard say:***

This can vary and should form part of the initial agreement between the supervisee and the supervisor. The types of things that usually form part of this agreement include:

- Debrief mediations (usually completed) and plan for future work
- Develop effective strategies for managing workload
- Increase professional competence through supportive and constructive reflection on mediation practices
- Encourage self-assessment of mediation skills in order to reflect and build on any perceived strengths and weaknesses
- Show awareness of a safe working environment
- Promote the welfare of the parties seen by the Supervisee
- Promote professional development and identify future goals and resources for learning
- Promote professional ethics
- Regular reflection of Supervisee’s work in order to develop and enhance their mediation practice and self-awareness.

#### ***Jane says:***

In both individual and group supervision:

- A *regular* opportunity for professional development.
- A way of developing and benefiting from reflective practice.
- A trusting relationship where you can explore both what went well and what didn’t
- An opportunity to discuss current work, ethics, expectations, issues in theory, material read and courses attended
- Ideas for future work opportunities

#### ***Jill says:***

- Feeling professionally supported in the work
- One should expect to be professionally stretched by supervision as an ‘added extra’
- Case studies and research studies and professional opinion pieces are valuable.
- A supervisor should be able to think outside the square and highlight areas and examples of practicing **strategically rather than defensively.**
- Support and strategies for time management

#### **Contributors:**

**Gerard Sullivan** is a registered psychologist, experienced mediator and professional supervisor.

**Carol Powell** is a highly experienced mediator and trained professional supervisor.

**Jill Goldson** is a counsellor and mediator who provides supervision services for individuals and groups.

**Jane Schaverien** is an experienced mediator, facilitator and professional supervisor. Jane developed and continues to facilitate LEADR & IAMA’s online supervision groups.

## What are some different approaches to professional supervision?

### *Jill says:*

- Different approaches to supervision can involve one- on -one or group supervision, face to face or electronic
- Workplace supervision can be valuable
- The reading of a piece of research between sessions and a discussion the following session (a la book club model), using clinical examples from own practice.
- Case study presentation – from supervisee practice. Followed by strategic questions which marry together theory and practice.
- Articulation of barriers, recognition of challenges and ways of dealing with them.
- Enabling the recognition of strategies through difficulties.
- Encouragement to follow through professional development; articulation of what is needed, and follow through with communication of professional requests for training to professional organisations.
- Opportunity to discuss personal impact of working with distress – e.g dealing with contagion, boundaries of accountability, apprehending complaints

### *Jane says:*

#### *Line Supervision and Professional Supervision*

- Professional Supervision is the kind of Supervision that helps us improve our practice. It is not the same as
- Line Supervision, which is about accountability to an employing organisation.

(The current recognition of the importance of Professional supervision for mediators fits with the increasing understanding of conflict resolution as a human relationships/psycho-social process as much as an optional remedy for a legal problem. Some areas of statutory mediation have compliance requirements necessitating a process of supervision and reflective practice.

Professional supervision is usually confidential and can only have employment consequences if the supervision agreement allows for disclosure by the supervisor, for example in situations where there is risk or safety involved)

#### *Professional Supervision for Individuals or Groups*

- Individual supervision involves a one to one trusting and confidential relationship based on agreed parameters.
- Group Supervision works best for a group of peers with some overlapping interests

#### *Supervision models:*

Usually, though not always, the model used in supervision reflects the model used in the supervisee's work. So for a mediator who uses the LEADR model of mediation the supervision would follow the structure of that model: agenda, issues, options, decisions....

### *Carol says:*

- Individual sessions on an appropriately regular basis (generally around once a month where the practitioner is practising regularly in the area).
- Combined supervision using a specialist in therapeutic practice alongside an experienced mediator
- Group supervision with a small (up to about 6) people who meet together with their supervisor
- Peer supervision; can be one on one (ideally if this is the case then it is not a direct reciprocal arrangement)
- Peer supervision – group. Ideally the group will use a clear model to ensure that each member of the group is able to bring their issues; the group will assist its members to identify areas of concern, ideas for enhancing practice and areas for professional development. The group will

need expertise ie not a full answer to supervision particularly when the group has limited experience.

- Combination of group and personal supervision where an individual will meet regularly with the group and meet regularly but less frequently with a one on one supervisor

## What does high quality professional supervision look like?

Gerard explains that it is important that professional supervision is regular in order to build the trust and confidence necessary to be able to communicate the things that matter most and perhaps would otherwise not be addressed. This requires open and honest discussion about the supervisee's work and his/her responses to it. The supervisee can evaluate the supervision sessions and discuss with the supervisor what is helpful and not so helpful. If either the supervisor or the supervisee feels they can't raise particular issue(s), it may be time to consider a new supervisor. A good match isn't a given and even a good match can eventually become less effective.

High quality supervision is many things and Gerard suggests as a starting point that supervisees would have much to gain by researching this very question. In other words, good supervision is the result of the supervisee's input, much the same way that good mediation is the outcome of the efforts and actions of the parties. That is, the mediator / supervisor is primarily there to facilitate. To this end Gerard has attached readings which can help inform good mediation practice and perhaps provide many topics for useful discussion in professional supervision.

### *Jane says:*

- The supervisee sets the agenda, discussing topics of importance to him or her at that time
- The supervisor listens, asking questions to encourage the supervisee to explore more deeply and consider new possibilities.
- The supervisor may comment, direct the conversation in a particular way, share from his/her own experience or suggest reading or video to consider.
- The supervisor tracks the supervisee's issues over time so that any recurring patterns can be brought to the supervisee's attention.

### *Carol says:*

- Confidential
- The Supervisor is open and honest with the Supervisee
- The Supervisor gives constructive feedback, guidance and support
- The Supervisor appropriately challenges the Supervisee to promote reflection and to enable the Supervisee to identify areas for professional development
- The Supervisor intervenes as appropriate in situations of risk
- There are clear boundaries around roles and the Supervisee holds the responsibility for their own professional practise; supervision is primarily a process of reflection, the focus is not on coaching or instruction
- The Supervisor is reasonably accessible (e.g., during working hours) by telephone or email between professional supervision sessions where the Supervisee becomes concerned about any supervision issue.
- Both parties abide by their respective professional Codes of Ethics

### *Jill says:*

High quality supervision possibly feels, (rather than looks?) like:

- A sense of having some core professional development needs met:
- Belonging to a professional cohort
- Validation of the challenging aspects in areas of the work

- Considered responses to those challenges
- Evidence- based research material which underscores the work in progress
- Confidentiality, qualifications and reliability of Supervisor
- Support around resolution of professional/workplace interface issues –whether private work or organisational

***Thanks to Carol, Jill, Jane and Gerard for their comments.  
We hope this assists you to reflect on your supervision arrangements.***

## Further Reading

**Recommended by Gerard Sullivan and available online:**

Brandon, Mieke (2002) "Family and child mediators — obligations to seek supervision, but what does it really mean?," *ADR Bulletin*:

Vol. 5: No. 8, Article 3.

Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/adr/vol5/iss8/3>

Keys, Bianca (2006) "No mediator is an island: A mediator supports others, but who supports the mediator?," *ADR Bulletin*: Vol. 8:

No. 10, Article 4.

Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/adr/vol8/iss10/4>

Brenner, Michelle (2009) "Redefining supervision from 'the gaze' to 'supportive practice'," *ADR Bulletin*: Vol. 11: No. 5, Article 4.

Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/adr/vol11/iss5/4>

Fisher, Linda (2002) "What mediators bring to practice: process, philosophy, prejudice, personality," *ADR Bulletin*: Vol. 5: No. 4, Article 4.

Available at: <http://epublications.bond.edu.au/adr/vol5/iss4/4>

"Dispute Resolution Centre News Volume 37" (2013). *Dispute Resolution Centre Newsletter*. Paper 41.

<http://epublications.bond.edu.au/drcn/41>

Mieke Brandon: REFLECTION AND SELF AWARENESS: *'if you don't know your stuff you will get caught in your clients' stuff and that will create more stuff'*