

Supervision of work with people with personality disorders

This section assumes that supervisors have a good knowledge of the competence framework for people with personality disorder (<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/CORE/>). This sets out the skills and knowledge that supervisees are expected to demonstrate, and details the range of therapist activities associated with clinical work in this area.

The competences in this section apply to the supervision of work with people with personality disorder. As such they are applicable across all modalities of therapy.

Underpinning supervision competences

Supervisor's expertise

An ability for the supervisor to draw on the principles and evidence underpinning the psychological intervention being applied, on knowledge of the competences associated with the approach, and on personal experience of its delivery

An ability to recognise (and to remedy) any limitations in knowledge and/or experience which has implications for the supervisor's capacity to offer effective supervision

An ability to ensure that supervision integrates attention to generic therapeutic skills (such as managing the therapeutic alliance or responding to a client's distress) while also focussing on the development and /or maintenance of skills specifically associated with the psychological model being applied

An ability to identify and address concerns about supervisees whose competence or whose ethical standard falls below that which is appropriate to the clinical context in which they are working

Where the supervisor is acting both as a mentor and an evaluator of the supervisee, and ability to hold these two roles in balance

An ability to recognise problematic interactions between supervisor and supervisee and to seek consultation in order to identify an appropriate way forward (including making alternative arrangements for supervision)

Adapting supervision to the supervisee's training needs

An ability to help the supervisee reflect on their development as a practitioner in order to identify and address their specific training needs

An ability to identify the supervisee's knowledge of, and experience with, the model they are applying

an ability to identify and discuss any misconceptions that the supervisee may hold regarding the model and its associated techniques

An ability to identify and address any limitations in the supervisee's knowledge and understanding of relevant competence frameworks and their application in practice

An ability to negotiate and implement learning agreements which reflect the supervisee's learning needs

Supervisee's stance, values and assumptions

An ability to monitor the supervisee's capacity to maintain a validating stance towards the client and to take an inquisitive perspective to understand the client's presentation and the evolution of therapy, for example:

maintaining an open, genuine and non-judgemental stance towards the client

instilling a sense of hope

helping clients to make informed decisions and choices with regard to their own treatment

helping the client make appropriate choices in the context of their problems

An ability to help the supervisee articulate their assumptions about, and attitudes towards, the client population

Navigating systems

An ability to help the supervisee understand and navigate professional systems, such as multi-professional teams, for example:

formulating the perspectives and goals of each member of the team (especially where there are differences in their perspective and assumptions)

role-playing communicating with different members of the team

An ability to help the supervisee manage professional boundaries

Using modelling to facilitate communication with clients and with systems

An ability to use modelling, for example:

within supervision (e.g. role playing ways of responding to a hostile client in supervision, or to help a supervisee envisage how to help a team come to a shared model)

with clients (e.g. modelling conversation with clients who are finding it difficult to communicate)

Using observation

An ability to set up observations of sessions, either live or through recordings, and to identify and manage any potential obstacles to this e.g.

managing reluctance on the part of the supervisee (e.g. through direct discussion)

managing reluctance on the part of the client (e.g. conducting a joint session at the start of the intervention so that the client has a sense of the supervisor as a person rather than an unknown observer)

Specific supervision competences for working with people with personality disorder

Engaging the client

An ability to help supervisees maintain a focus on engagement throughout the intervention

Ability to help the supervisee recognise and address common challenges to engagement, for example:

clients being unfamiliar and unclear about the nature of therapy

clients whose experiences of relationships make it harder for them to engage

An ability to help the supervisee identify any assumptions they are making about the personal, social and professional resources available to the client, and to tailor their intervention appropriately, for example:

clients with high frequency of self-harm or where there is potential harm to others

clients with limited financial resources or experiencing other forms of social hardship or adversity

clients in unstable relationships

An ability to help the supervisee ensure that they consider the ways in which the client's culture and background influences the ways in which they understand and explain their experiences, and any implications of this for engagement and for the intervention

Working collaboratively

An ability to monitor and support the supervisee's capacity to maintain a genuine, non-judgmental and transparent collaboration (e.g. be validating and empathic, rather than subtly invalidating or unintentionally suggesting the person is wrong)

An ability to promote the supervisee's capacity to recognise signs that interactions are not fully collaborative and to identify and address the reasons for this

An ability to help the supervisee maintain a focus on eliciting feedback from the client so as to check what they are experiencing (e.g. asking 'how did the client respond to that' 'what exactly did they say')

Managing therapeutic alliance strains and ruptures

An ability to support the supervisee's capacity to notice the development and emergence of strains and ruptures in the therapeutic alliance, for example helping them to:

draw on the formulation to anticipate potential areas of threat to the therapeutic relationship

identify (and become sensitive to) 'markers' of alliance strains and ruptures as these emerge in the session

An ability to support the supervisee's capacity to respond actively to strains and ruptures in the alliance, for example helping them to:

draw the client's attention to the strain or rupture

engage the client in a reflective discussion that helps to identify the factors that have contributed to alliance strains and ruptures and to those that have supported the relationship

speculatively locate the strain or rupture into the context of a previously-agreed collaborative formulation

maintain an open and reflective stance that includes acknowledgment of any contribution they may have made to the strain or rupture

ensure that discussion has been sufficient to enable the client to 'work-through' (and so make sense of) the issues contributing to the rupture, and so help to repair the therapeutic relationship

Supervisee's ability to balance structure with working responsively

An ability to help the supervisee achieve an appropriate balance between structuring sessions and being responsive to the client for example:

balancing the need to be an empathic concerned listener with the need to institute an active intervention

balancing directiveness and the need for change with the need to listen to the client and to maintain a strong focus on the therapeutic alliance

recognising when to limit time spent on 'formal' therapy and allow time for informal conversation/ discussion

recognising when the client is less able to make changes and instead working on consolidating gains

being alert to the ways in which communications are being received by the client

being attentive to how the client is perceiving them

listening to what the client is distressed by and being able to negotiate an appropriate focus

recognise the differences between a deliberate move off a hot topic, collaborative direction changes, and unhelpful deviations from the agenda (on either side)

Supervisee's capacity to work with strong emotion

An ability to support the supervisee's capacity to tolerate and work with strong or extreme expression of emotions in the session (including offensive or threatening behaviour), for example:

modelling potential responses to the client (e.g. demonstrating how to name the feelings being expressed in the context of a straightforward conversational style)

helping the supervisee discuss their own reactions to expressions of strong emotion

helping the supervisee to understand how to use their own emotional reactions in a therapeutically constructive way, and to identify when it could be useful to do this

helping the supervisee to recognise and acknowledge personal stress related to the inevitable pressures and demands of engaging in such work, and to seek support when appropriate

Managing risk

An ability to support the supervisee's capacity to manage risk, and to ensure the client's and their own safety, for example:

setting up appointments at times of day when other members of staff are accessible

ensuring that supervisees know who they can contact urgently

ensuring that supervisees can differentiate acute and chronic risk and respond appropriately

ensuring that supervisees are aware of local systems for managing risk, and the procedures for accessing and using these systems

An ability to help the supervisee judge how to balance risk aversion against appropriate risk taking (for example, so as to allow the client to conduct practice assignments)

An ability to support the supervisee's capacity to maintain an awareness of the risk of adverse therapeutic outcomes (e.g. deterioration, premature dropout), helping them:

to identify clients where there are indications of an adverse outcome

to formulate the factors that may be pertinent and use this formulation to identify and implement appropriate strategies aimed at addressing and reducing the risk of an adverse outcome

Encouraging reflection

An ability to help the supervisee identify, express and make therapeutic use of difficult feelings that emerge when undertaking the intervention, for example:

frustration when there is marked variation from session to session, or where clients do not seem to make progress

personal reactions to clients who are hostile and who elicit rejection from others (including the supervisee) or who elicit increased caring or rescuing responses

Instituting the intervention

Ability to help the supervisee explain the rationale and process of change strategies, and to introduce these at a pace that is agreed with the client

An ability to help the supervisee identify and to focus on areas where there is room (and motivation on the part of the client) for change

An ability to help the supervisee consider whether, when and how coexisting conditions (such as substance abuse, anxiety or depression) need to be addressed

An ability to help the supervisee to express their uncertainty about the delivery of the intervention (e.g. its pace, variations in mood or accessibility from session to session)

An ability to make use of role play to model areas of the intervention that the supervisee finds challenging

An ability to help the supervisee identify the primary ways the client's personality functioning interferes with or supports treatment

An ability to help the supervisee tolerate and address slow rates of change and/or apparent relapses in people with personality disorder

An ability to help the supervisee focus on endings and to manage these in way that preserves the benefits of the intervention (particularly when the ending is potentially difficult)

Specific supervision competences for working with families or significant others in contact with people with PD

Supervisee attitudes to families and significant others

An ability to support the supervisee's capacity to understand family functioning through the lens of personality disorder and its wide-ranging impact on the family, and to help them:
construe patterns of family interaction as the family's attempt to manage a difficult situation
be aware of the risk of labelling families (e.g. as 'problem families')
An ability to help the supervisee discuss their assumptions about the ways that family functioning impacts on service users, and to help them:
being aware of blaming families (e.g. as the cause of service-user's problems)
Identify the emotional needs of the family/significant other

Training needs of supervisees who are moving from individual to family work

An ability to identify the needs of supervisees who are moving from individual to working with families/significant others
An ability to help the supervisee manage any discomfort with the feeling that the family will have expectations of them as a therapist

Maintaining a neutral stance

An ability to help the supervisee maintain a neutral position in relation to family members and family assumptions, for example by drawing their attention:
to alliances and allegiances they are forming with individual family members
to occasions when they are identifying with unhelpful family views (e.g. sharing a pessimistic view about the possibility of change)

Balancing the needs of each member of the family

An ability to help the supervisee balance the needs of family against the needs of individual members (e.g. by drawing attention to the 'bigger picture' and planning how to convey this in sessions)
An ability to help the supervisee support the service user as an expert in their own condition, helping them share their concerns and anxieties with their family, and identifying any anxieties that they have about doing so

Working with other services

An ability to help the supervisee work with other members of the professional system
An ability to help the supervisee generalise the skills they have learned to help them be more effective in their dealings with other professionals

Managing confidentiality in family work

An ability to help the supervisee manage issues of confidentiality between family members (e.g. when one member of the family makes disclosures about another)
An ability to ensure that the supervisee has a good understanding of what information can and cannot be shared with relatives who are in a caring role (and so are able to make informed judgments about how to manage confidentiality)

Supervision/ support for supervisors

An ability for the supervisor to recognise when they are experiencing difficulties for which they themselves would benefit from support, for example when families being seen by the supervisee:
experience an untoward incident (such as suicide)
present significant risk issues

