

6.2 SUPERVISING PEERS: SUPPORTIVE SUPERVISION

READ MORE: STRUCTURED SUPERVISION

Structured Group Supervision

A four-phased model, ‘Structured Group Supervision’, gives an individual peer the opportunity to share and receive feedback from more than one person. The individual peer is able to experience uninterrupted group attention, and at the same time, it benefits all members of the group. The group supervision process can help build a shared identity among coworkers and can be facilitated by a leader without expertise in clinical supervision. It is, however, essential to the process that the facilitator preserves a safe, constructive environment for discussing difficulties in working with clients. Each phase requires 10 to 15 minutes of group time, and the facilitator is responsible for timekeeping and for monitoring the questioning and discussion.

PHASE ONE: Presentation and Request-for-Assistance Statement

The presenter describes a case, addressing the following questions:

- What are the facts?
- How did the situation arise?
- What specifically do I want help with in this case?

The information may be written up in advance if the group wishes. Following the presentation of the summary information, the presenter makes a specific request for assistance with the case. Specific requests may concern:

- Assessing or characterizing a client’s needs
- Facilitating a client’s progress
- Overcoming a perceived block
- Processing his or her emotional reaction to a client
- Developing specific counseling skills
- Working effectively in collaboration with colleagues or other staff members.

PHASE TWO: Questioning Period and Identification of Focus

Supervision group members question the presenter in order to obtain additional information and/or better understand and clarify issues involved in the request for assistance. This is done in round-robin fashion, with each group member asking one question in turn. If necessary the first member to ask questions begins the second round of questions, until the group feels it fully understands the focus of the request for assistance. The identification of focus will impact on the discussion in the next phase.

PHASE THREE: Feedback Statements and Discussion

During this phase the presenter is instructed to remain silent and listen without responding immediately to feedback. However, the presenter may take notes. After a brief pause, the facilitator asks the group members to make constructive suggestions, taking turns in round-robin fashion.

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These suggestions should be phrased as “I ...” statements. It may be preferable to talk about the presenter in the third person rather than addressing him/her directly. The facilitator does not engage in discussion, but needs to monitor the group process, discouraging judgmental comments and overly harsh criticism. If necessary, the facilitator may ask a member to rephrase his or her feedback so that it addresses the presenter’s request for assistance.

A pause period then follows (2-3 minutes) to give the presenter time to process the emergent material. The group should remain silent, perhaps reviewing and adding to notes, during the pause.

PHASE FOUR: Presenter’s responses

The presenter responds to the feedback with regard to which aspects were helpful, and is encouraged to say why the feedback and discussion was or was not beneficial. The facilitator may allow an open discussion period following the completion of the four phases, should time allow.



Sylvia Young (right) talks with two peer advocates at WORLD.

“The one piece of advice I would give to a peer supervisor is to have compassion for the peers who are doing this work because they are living with a life-threatening, chronic illness, and challenges will come up.”

Sylvia Young
Peer Supervisor
WORLD
Oakland, CA

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Phase	Purpose	Presenter	Group	Facilitator
Presentation & request assistance (10 – 15 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide group with info about case or problem • Identify specific nature of request for assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present selected case • Request assistance in area of concern 	Take notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask presenter to begin • Ensure that only presenter speaks
Questions & focusing (10 – 15 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more information • Construct group understanding of case and specific request 	Answer questions	Ask clarifying questions, each person taking a turn as long as necessary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor time • Ensure that one person has the floor • Continue questions until no more questions
Feedback statements (10 – 15 min)	Provide suggestions and insights	Take notes	Give feedback, each person taking a turn	Monitor time
Pause period (2 – 3 min)	Give time to assimilate suggestions and insights	Review notes	Remain silent	Ask group to pause Monitor time
Presenter's response (10 – 15 min)	Identify benefits of suggestions and insights	Respond to suggestions and insights	Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor time • Ensure that only presenter has the floor
Optional discussion (10 – 15 min)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process the session • Identify benefits for group 	Free discussion	Free discussion	Monitor time One speaker at a time

Reference: Wilbur, M.P., Roberts-Wilbur, J., Morris, J. R., and Hart, G.M. (1991). Structured group supervision: theory and practice. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 16, 2, 91 – 100. Adapted by: Thulani Vazi, Psychosocial Wellness Coordinator, International Center for AIDS Care and Treatment Programs, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University

This “Read More” section accompanies [Section 6.2 Supervising Peers: Supportive Supervision](#), part of the online toolkit, *Building Blocks to Peer Program Success*. For more information, visit http://www.hdwg.org/peer_program/program_dev.