

Personal Supervision Model: Community Reinforcement Approach

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Abstract

Supervision is a complex and multi-faceted process where a senior or more experienced supervisor meets with a junior member or supervisee to provide feedback, guidance, and support to improve aspects of counseling and guide professional development. The goal of supervision is growth and continued development in the supervisee which can be achieved through a variety of supervision practices including work sample review, role-play, evaluation, and self-reflection. Community Reinforcement Approach (CRA) is an evidence-based therapy model with the goal of replacing problematic behavior with healthy and positive behaviors through skill acquisition provided in a positive and non-judgmental manner (Azrin, 1976; Hunt & Azrin, 1973).

Community Reinforcement supervision is a cognitive-behavioral supervision framework that is provided in an atmosphere that is positive, supportive, and uplifting to the supervisee. Moreover, a strength-based approach that underscores and reinforces the skills and strengths of the supervisee should be highlighted throughout the supervisory process. While supervisors serve as mentors and collaborators, it is important to be aware of the power differential in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. This paper will review the definition of supervision, the role of the supervisor, the process of evaluation, the theory of counselor development, and the relationship to counseling theory. Linkages to supervision models and a biblical worldview will be woven in throughout the paper.

Keywords: supervision, supervisor, supervisee, strength-based, collaborative, development, Community Reinforcement Approach (CRA)

Personal Supervision Model: Community Reinforcement Approach

A personal supervision model should have intentionality and a specific focus within a supervisor's philosophy and process of evaluation, theory of counselor development, and relationship to counseling theory. A linkage exists between the supervisor's own counseling theory and the supervisor's theory and process of supervision. The informed consent document reviewed with supervisees at the onset of the supervisory relationship outlines these areas to ensure that the supervisee has a full understanding of the scope, background, and practice of the supervisor.

Community Reinforcement Approach (CRA) is an evidence-based model shown to be effective in reducing substance use and problematic behaviors among a variety of populations (e.g. different ages, cultures, genders) by replacing maladaptive behavior with healthy and positive behaviors and activities (Azrin, 1976; Hunt & Azrin, 1973). A Community Reinforcement Approach to supervision assists the supervisee with skill acquisition through role-play and feedback that is provided in a positive and supportive manner by the supervisor.

In community behavioral health settings, supervisors may have a variety of supervisees from different backgrounds, including counseling, social work, and psychology. The counseling supervisor uses the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) to guide ethical decision making. If there are differences in the ethical standards based on these various disciplines, the differences will be discussed in a manner that is transparent and open. If the differences result in a lack of consensus with regard to client care, consultation will be sought through a third supervisor, usually an agency director. Furthermore, in community behavioral health settings, supervisors often work with a variety of clinicians, including clinicians new to the field to seasoned and licensed clinicians. Supervision is provided for all clinical staff to

promote continued learning and development and avoid the potential for stagnation which may inadvertently cause harm to the client. To promote effective and quality supervision, the supervisor must explicitly outline his or her personal philosophy and model of counseling supervision, including the definition of supervision, the role of the supervisor, the philosophy and process of evaluation, the theory of counselor development, and the relationship to counseling theory. First, the definition of supervision will be discussed.

Definition of Supervision

Supervision is a dynamic, collaborative, strength-based, and evaluative process that occurs between a senior member of the counseling field and a more junior member. The purpose of supervision is to highlight the supervisee's strengths, identify areas of improvement, and foster continued growth and professional development in a manner that is positive, supportive, and collaborative. Supervision occurs at regularly scheduled intervals and can be face-to-face or through video conference. In many community behavioral health settings, supervision occurs face-to-face; however, with the onset of the COVID-19 virus and the required mitigation strategies that began around mid-March 2020, supervision has been expanded to include telesupervision. Research indicates that telesupervision is perceived to have equal overall quality to in-person supervision with additional benefits including improved flexibility and increased accessibility of training (Jordan & Shearer, 2019).

Role of the Supervisor

The supervisor's role is multi-faceted. First, the supervisor is a collaborator. In this role, the supervisor seeks to understand the supervisee's goals and builds a supervision plan to align with the supervisee's desired goals and outcomes. For example, if the supervisee would like to receive training in play therapy and this model does not fall within the supervisor's area of

competence, the supervisor will seek resources and consultation for the supervisee to achieve this goal. In the collaborative relationship the supervisor serves as an encourager to the supervisee in keeping with a Christian worldview: And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching (King James Bible, 1769/2017, Hebrews 10:24-25).

Second, the supervisor is a mentor to their supervisee. In this role the supervisor is a role-model and a resource for their supervisee. The supervisor models professional behavior, including appropriate and professional attire and positive communication with internal and external stakeholders, including clients and community members. The supervisor serves as a mentor as he or she is approachable and available to the supervisee beyond just the regularly scheduled supervision times. This is often colloquially referred to as an “open door” policy. This policy can provide the supervisee a level of support needed to foster development. The supervisee may have a quick question or a need to staff a more immediate case, and supervisor availability assists the supervisee with feeling supported and fosters the professional relationship.

Third, the supervisor serves as an evaluator. An inherent power differential exists in supervision as supervision is an evaluative process. In a community behavioral health settings, clinical supervisors are often administrative supervisors which adds an additional layer of oversight and evaluation. Evaluation occurs at regularly scheduled intervals (i.e. performance evaluations, quarterly evaluations); however, feedback should be provided to the supervisee throughout the supervision process. Feedback occurs in oral and written form. Work sample review is a mechanism to provide feedback in a supportive and facilitative manner. The supervisor reviews audio or video sessions of the supervisee and offers both positive and

constructive feedback while engaging the supervisee in reflection and discussion on the supervisee's feedback of the session. Moreover, the supervisor seeks the supervisee's feedback on the process of supervision to ensure that the supervision provided aligns with the supervisee's stated goals and objectives for growth and development.

Philosophy and Process of Evaluation

The evaluative process of supervision consists of verbal and written feedback that is delivered at regular scheduled intervals and provided throughout the supervision process to facilitate continuous quality improvement (Borders, 2018). There are several areas that are evaluated in supervision including the supervisee's work samples, progress notes, case conceptualization, diagnostic formulation, treatment planning, and professional behaviors (i.e. adherence to confidentiality, code of ethics, professional presentation). The supervisor uses a reflective approach with the supervisee to elicit the supervisee's feedback in the aforementioned areas. A reflective approach allows the supervisee to take an introspective view at his or her work to identify areas of strength and areas of continued growth. This approach facilitates a collaborative relationship between the supervisor and supervisee as each individual offers feedback into the supervisee's growth and development (Cummings et al., 2015).

Through work sample reviews the supervisor can reinforce positive aspects of the supervisee's counseling skills and provide constructive feedback on areas of improvement. Feedback is provided in a manner that is supportive, specific, and motivating for the supervisee. This philosophy of evaluation aligns with the Community Reinforcement Approach (CRA) in working with clients as a CRA counselor takes a strength-based and motivating approach with his or her clients to facilitate change. Feedback is shared during the supervision meetings and may also be provided through electronic mail and through completion of performance

evaluations which are required in many public behavioral health settings. Although the performance evaluation in public behavioral health has components of administrative supervision, the supervisor includes feedback on the supervisee's clinical skills in the areas of case conceptualization, diagnostic formulation, treatment planning, and service delivery. Written and formalized feedback is provided in order to facilitate supervisee growth in clinical skills and service delivery in accordance with a cognitive-behavioral supervision framework (Cummings et al., 2015).

Theory of Counselor Development

Counselor development begins in graduate school and continues throughout the span of one's career. All counselors develop at their own individual and unique pace. Additionally, all counselors have their own individual strengths and areas of improvement. Therefore, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to development. Counselor development is optimal when the supervisee can take a reflective and in depth view of their own strengths, needs, and areas of growth. Counselor development should be facilitated through clinical supervision that occurs at regularly scheduled intervals. A developmental approach to supervision is included as the supervision is tailored to the supervisee's stage of development.

In the beginning stages of counselor development, the supervisor may take a more directive role of coach and teacher. For example, the supervisor may provide more directive feedback on when to make a child protective services report or how to conduct a thorough risk assessment. In the early stages of counselor development, the supervisee may be new to a particular modality that they are using. The supervisor may provide feedback through work sample review and teaching skills or procedures in the treatment model that the supervisee is implementing. In the early stages of development supervisees may experience anxiety about the

supervision process, their counseling, and their perceived level of competence. In keeping with a Christian worldview, the supervisor underscores the importance of the following verse: Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you (King James Bible, 1769/2017, 1 Peter 5:7). The supervisor normalizes and validates the supervisee's feelings at this stage of development. In the mid stages of development, the supervisee is able to perform with greater independence and less dependency on the supervisor. The supervisor, in turn, may take a less directive approach in the supervision. In the later stages of development, the role of the supervisor becomes consultative.

The supervisor facilitates counselor development with a technique used in CRA, called role-play. In a role-play the supervisor will play the role of the client and the supervisee will play him or herself. The role-play allows the supervisee to practice skills and receive feedback to help shape their skills. Often a role-play will be introduced in supervision after the supervisor offers constructive feedback on an aspect of the counseling session that he or she has reviewed. An additional technique that may be used to preface the introduction of a role-play in supervision is the reverse role-play. In the reverse role-play, the supervisor plays the role of the supervisee and the supervisee plays the role of the client. The main objective is for the supervisor to model skills or a specific technique for the supervisee. A secondary objective is to foster the supervisee's understanding or empathy for the client's point of view. Role-plays may be used at all stages of counselor development. Lastly, a developmental approach to supervision encompasses a collaborative approach as both the supervisor and supervisee are responsible for fostering a stimulation of growth and development.

Relationship to Counseling Theory

A parallel process exists with the relationship of the supervisor's personal supervision model to the supervisor's own counseling theory. A supervisor whose counseling theory is grounded in a cognitive-behavioral approach will use many of the same approaches in working with supervisees. Community Reinforcement Approach (CRA) is an empirically supported cognitive-behavioral model focusing on replacing problematic behaviors with healthy and rewarding behaviors and activities through use of reinforcers and skill acquisition. A CRA counselor will assist the client in identifying motivators or reinforcers to stop or decrease the problematic behavior. A CRA supervisor will identify the supervisee's motivators to advance their growth and development. For example, a supervisee may have a goal of improving their ability to set a session agenda at the beginning of their counseling sessions. The supervisor will assist the supervisee in setting a positive, specific, measurable, and straightforward objective to align with their goal. Furthermore, the supervisor assigns homework to the supervisee. A homework assignment may be to practice setting the session agenda five times over the next week in their counseling sessions. As part of the CRA model, homework is assigned to the client at the end of each session. Subsequently, the previous session's homework is reviewed at the beginning of each counseling session (Azrin, 1976; Hunt & Azrin, 1973; Myers & Smith, 1995; Smith et al., 2001). Parallel to the counseling process, the supervisor reviews the supervisee's homework at the beginning of the supervision. The supervision session is structured by setting a supervision agenda that includes agenda items from both the supervisor and the supervisee (Cummings et al., 2015; Schmidt, 1979).

Newman (1998) outlines similarities and differences in cognitive-behavioral therapy and cognitive-behavioral supervision. First, both process are collaborative, focus on teaching skills,

measure progress objectively, use structure and time-limits, and acknowledge the power imbalance. Differences include that supervision does not provide counseling to the supervisee, different guidelines for termination exist, and supervision is a combined effort on behalf of a third party (e.g. the client).

Conclusion

Supervision is a dynamic, interactive, collaborative, and strength-based process where a senior counselor provides guidance, feedback, and support to a more junior counselor. The goal of supervision is to facilitate growth and development of the supervisee in a manner that is uplifting, positive, and supportive. In line with the Community Reinforcement Approach, an evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy model, the supervisor models skills for the supervisee, provides specific feedback of work samples, and engages the supervisee in role-play during supervision to shape the supervisee's counseling skills. A CRA counselor embraces skill development on the part of client to replace problematic behavior with healthy behaviors and skills in a manner that is supportive and uplifting. Similarly, a CRA supervisor fosters skill development on the part of the supervisee. Counselor development begins at the onset of graduate school and continues throughout the professional lifespan of the counselor. The supervisor understands the unique developmental level of each supervisee and develops a collaborative supervision plan to support growth and development of the supervisee's stated goals. This understanding falls in line with a Christian worldview: Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing (King James Bible, 1769/2017, 1 Thessalonians 5:11). This support and collaboration is the cornerstone of effective supervision.

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