

Episode 2 - what is clinical supervision

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SPEAKERS

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Hello, and welcome. You're listening to the craft of supervision. My name is Dr. Mish and I'm a psychotherapist and supervisor. And I have a real passion and enthusiasm for all things clinical supervision. So I thought I'd bring my enthusiasm for the subject to this podcast. And here I'll invite you to come on a bit of a journey with me to explore this wonderful world of supervision, through looking at the different models through the research, the debates, and any issues that come up when we're practising supervision. I'm really glad to be here. And I hope it will be useful for you too. So let's go. So hello, everyone, and welcome to this episode of the craft of supervision. And I thought it'd be a really good idea to start at the beginning to get a few definitions of supervision and just explain what it is really, because this is something I get asked a lot. And I really think it's useful to just have some sort of baseline understanding of what supervision is, before we can move on to looking at some of the more intricate details. So what is clinical supervision? Well, essentially, supervision means having some sort of oversight or overseeing the work that's been done by someone else. So if we think of that in a clinical term, that means that it will be the work that you're doing that will end up being looked at by another person. So obviously, when we're thinking of clinical supervision in terms of say, psychological work, that can sometimes be a bit of a worry around the scrutiny that comes with supervision, so we may come on to that in a bit. And clinical supervision has been around for many helping professions, and it's used all over the world. For a lot of people who've done some psychological training, supervision happens mainly at the trainee part of their training. And then in a lot of places, once you become qualified in whatever therapeutic work you'll be doing often across the globe. Supervision isn't necessarily seen to be a necessary part of your work, which I always find slightly strange, because I would say supervision is important across the lifespan of your work. And particularly here in the UK, if you're a member of BAC, P and other memberships as well of professional bodies, they often expect you to have some sort of supervision agreement over the course of your work from when you're in training throughout your qualification as well. And when you're a more seasoned practitioner, but yeah, it's adopted across loads and loads of different helping professions. And it's not a new thing, I suppose in work that you will have some sort of mentor, or guidance or be learning from someone that has either more experience or an area of expertise that you need to learn about. So I suppose having some sort of supervision is quite common. Often supervision has been linked to nursing and particularly in midwifery, for example, for psychological professions, supervision tends to be linked back to Freud. And within psychoanalysis supervision emerged really out of therapists wanting to consult with other therapists about their work with clients. And I suppose that was a bit of a catalyst for it to be adopted across all different modalities of

psychological therapies. So it has definitely moved away from a psycho analytical route. And particularly, some of the models now are not necessarily linked to any particular modality of working, which is really welcomed, in my humble opinion. But I will do a specific episode about the different models of supervision. So look out for that one, if that's something you're interested in.

So when we go back to looking at the history of supervision, so yeah, it came from more psychological professions, and it's been steeped in nursing. And actually, it's now been rolled out really across the helping professions. So it's not uncommon now for people across social care and health or in some education settings and criminal justice settings, all sorts of health care setting, not uncommon for people to need some sort of clinical supervision and it's often linked to good practice if your role is to help others and one of the key definition differences I think, for me is that while supervision may be seen in some professions as attending to performance indicators or target driven, the difference about having clinical supervision or professional supervision, it just has a different spin on it. So it's not therapy. And I want to make that bit really clear, because a lot of people who don't quite understand what supervision is think it's like practitioners who go and have therapy, and it's not therapy, even if bits of it may be therapeutic. So if we're saying that it's not therapy, and it's not necessarily about the performance indicators, or being target driven, so what is it fundamentally, supervision is about the work that you do, the person that you are and how you can reflect on how both of these things will influence what you do in your professional role. It's a process in which a supervisor and a supervisee will come together in a place that is about learning and reflection supervision is for the supervisors to think about the work they do. And essentially, it's the supervisors that tend to do all of the work. So for a supervisor, even though you're there, as someone to help facilitate that, the supervisee needs to come prep to do some of the work, then there are lots of definitions for supervision. So one of the ones that I like at the minute is from a book, it's by Peter Hawkings, and Eileen Mahan, and I'll post the details of any of the literature I'm using, I'll post all of them in the Episode Notes, but essentially, what Hawkins Mahan is saying this is their definition, supervision is a joint endeavour in which a practitioner with the help of a supervisor attend to their clients themselves as part of their client practitioner relationships, and the wider systemic and ecological contexts. And by doing so improves the quality of their work transforms their client relationships continuously develop themselves, their practice and the wider profession. So one of the things that they recognise is a bit of a long and tricky definition to kind of get your head round, slightly complex. But essentially, what they're saying is supervision is a joint thing. So supervisor, and supervisee are coming together to look at the challenges and the successes of the work. And they talk about in which the practitioner tends to their clients. So supervision always is about clients, even when we think we may be off on a tangent, not necessarily be strictly client focus, it can be client focused in the most broadest sense, that definition also includes about looking at themselves. And one of the things that they want to pull out in their definition is that it's important to put the practitioner and who they are within their work, which I really totally agree with. And there's another definition that I really like, which really centres this, their definition also covers the wider systemic and ecological context, which I really like. I think it's a really contemporary

view on supervision, because it is situating it in the wider global context that we have, which I think is really needed in supervision. And I hope that this will be more evident in the supervision going forward. And of course, they end their definition by talking about how it improves the quality of the work client relationships and develops themselves. So one of the things they're pulling out there, and this is what they explained in their book is that supervision is about learning. And I really liked that part of their key part of the definition that they're using. And I really liked that whole definition. Even if it's quite wordy and complex, one that says wordy and complex, they're trying to distil quite a multi

layered understanding of supervision into a few lines. So I forgive them off making it complex, because I think it's a really good definition. So the next one I like, which I'll just grab from over here is one that is by Derek Milne, and Robert Reiser. Now this one I really like because it tends just putting things down and lifting them up and putting things down. I really like this one, because this comes from their recent book about supportive clinical supervision. And for those that know me and know, one of my interest in supervision is about practitioner self care, this definition really, really speaks to me because it really is about putting the well being and resilience of the supervisee at the heart of supportive clinical supervision. So I really like this one. So their definition and again, I'll post the details of their book in the Episode Notes. So they say that their current definition and bear in mind they base this on some of the research that they've done, and so they can say that it's evidence based definition. So their current empirical definition of supportive supervision is this supportive clinical supervision addresses supervisees emotional experience of their workplace and their personal functioning in that context. It is a formal, case focused and intensive relational process conducted by a trained suitably experienced and appropriate supervisor. Specific supervision techniques. include problem formulation, coping strategy enhancement, facilitating peer support and empathic debriefing the primary mechanisms within supervision that enable these outcomes to be achieved, or experiential learning the supervision, Alliance and social support the main intended outcome for supervisees or reductions in personal distress and enhanced well being. Now, again, quite a mouthful, because they're trying to put a lot of their research and expertise, they're trying to distil it down into a succinct definition, which is really, really, really tricky, I think. But basically, they're saying that there are lots of different ways that you can address this. But fundamentally, the outcome for supervisees who have this supportive clinical supervision is to reduce any personal distress and enhance their well being. And there's something that I quite like in that it situates that at the heart of their thinking around supervision, because it is about making sure the practitioner is well enough so that they can help others. So I really liked this definition. And it also speaks to the work I've been doing around supervision as well. Yeah, so I like

that one. And the final one I want to share with you this one is from a total Legend of supervision called Professor Michael Carroll. Now, if you've not read any of Professor Carroll's books, or articles, or literature, or I think some of his training is still on YouTube, or some of his conversations, in my humble opinion, he is a real total Legend of supervision. I had the pleasure of meeting Michael Carroll a couple of times a few years ago, but he was a real inspiration for me doing my doctorate on clinical supervision. And I just loved that he after all of these years of dedicating his life to examining and practising supervision, that he was still really enthusiastic about it. So I really like how Michael offers this summary of supervision. So he started saying the first thing is the focus of supervision is practice, then the end result of supervision is learning. The method used in supervision is reflection supervisors facilitate that process by creating an environment and relationship that mediate learning. The supervisory relationship is the engine room of supervision. And what he goes on to say is that supervision, in my experience, rises or falls on the quality of that relationship, techniques, skills, strategies, contracts, and other nuts and bolts of supervision only makes sense when embedded in the kind of relationship that is initiated by supervisors, and CO created by all parties, a relationship of trust, fidelity and emotional connection. So basically, what Professor Carroll says in such a lovely way is that it's all about that relational connection. And I like that he would ask, what are we doing here? And then that question, it means multilayers. In my perspective, he's not just talking about what is the work, we're addressing it, but what is the work that the supervisor and the supervisor we're trying to do collaboratively? So I really like that Professor Carroll does tend to explain things in a way, which is without the complicated definitions that can be around. And I'm not saying that as a, necessarily is a criticism of more complicated ones. But there's something around the simplicity of how Michael Carroll tends to word things that for me, it really makes sense. Like I said, I will post the details of all

these in the Episode Notes. So that if you want to read up more about the three different authors that have more three different books that mentioned here, and you can so yeah, so what essentially all of the definitions are trying to capture is that supervision tends to address an educational element. There's relational aspects in it, there's an element of attending to the development and the mentoring of the supervisee. There's also some form of scrutiny or gatekeeping. Or we could say it's some form of quality control that supervision offers, but it also looks at the resilience of the work. And it's really crucial that it's a place for reflection and learning. So as supervisors, we need to encourage supervisees to be open and honest and transparent about the work that they do. And in order for them to be open, honest and transparent. We really need to make sure that the supervisory relationship fosters that and that we set up supervision in that way. So we also need to add in that supervisors can bring issues around who they are. And I mean that in terms of not just on the topsoil level, but in looking at the layers of intersectionality because as much as we like to think think that we can separate our personal and professional selves. Actually, in practice, this is really difficult. And therapists, and particularly anyone who helps others, you are the work that you do. Because if you think about it, when we do a helping profession, we're often drawn to do a certain role, because we have some sort of connection with it. And it's really important for that to be one of the things that get discussed in supervision, because like I say, we are our work. So we have to know, our supervisees, we have to know all about them, and how the different inspections are important in the work that they do. So in a nutshell, supervision is really for looking at the supervisee looking at their practice, that reflection learning and how you're going to apply those reflections that you've got from supervision to the work that you do. So what are the benefits? Well, certainly, for counselling and psychotherapy, and the psychological therapeutic world,

there often comes a certain caveat with the work that we do that we need to have a certain amount of supervision each month. And like I said, this isn't globally, unfortunately, it tends to be more in the UK that we have ongoing supervision, but I know a lot of my colleagues across the globe still do like to have their work supervised. And actually, I think this is really, really good model that the UK have, it can be used across the citizens across the helping professions, because reflective practice is key if you're working with other people. So we know that supervision offers a form of gatekeeping. Now what does that mean? Well, it's almost like when we think of supervision being the oversight of someone's work for someone to oversee your work, it can really help when there is a ethical issue or an issue that arises in your work that for some reason, as the supervisee you're not quite aware of you might be doing something in your work that perhaps is questionable, and taps into some thing that you're not aware that is being triggered in the work that you do. It's also useful if you've got a bit of reflective space to look at the things that you can improve, and the things that perhaps you're not quite getting right. And it's okay to not get things, right. And it's also okay to have that pointed out to you so that you can develop as a practitioner. So supervision can be about identifying some of the strengths and weaknesses in your work. And it also, hopefully, will give you a chance to explore any judgments or biases you make of others, because of course, we all have them. And it's really important to recognise how that is being played out in the work that you're doing. And of course, it puts our work into the wider context of the world. So there can be some global issues, for example, the recent pandemic that had a real impact in supervision. It definitely did. I certainly know, as a supervisee, it was something that I took immediately supervision about, oh, my God, how are we going to deal with lockdown? And how clients going to deal with lockdown?

And what does it mean to me as a person? And what does it mean to the work I can provide and my wellness as well, you know, there's all sorts of global issues that can arise in supervision, it's really important to have a place where you can think about the impact of all of this global stuff on your

work. So another benefit of supervision is that you're able to learn so one of the things is that a supervisor is in some respects, providing a place not just a reflection, but a place where you can learn. And there's a bit of a debate around whether a supervisor should have more years of experience or should have expertise in a certain field or whether there needs to be a level of hierarchy and supervision. Even the word hierarchy will mean that there are a number of debates that we can have a look at about the power imbalance in supervision. But certainly for me, as a supervisor, I do still like to go to someone who has more experience than I do and has particular expertise in certain areas. But as a supervisor, I also like to feel that my supervisees come to me because of certain levels of practice that I've been doing. And it can't just be because you liked them. It really can't as much as we want to make sure the relationship is right. And as Michael Carroll says, That's fundamentally the most important thing. There's also something about needing someone who you can learn from learning from someone doesn't mean that they need to have more years of experience, but they just might have experience in a different context. It really does help if you have someone that you can learn from and who appreciates the learning, journey and supervision There's also an element that some people do call peer supervision. And I'm not going to talk about that in this one. But I will talk about the different forms of supervision on a future podcast. So look out for that. So another benefit of supervision is that it will help you keep up to date with professional developments, legal issues, policy issues, and it really gives you a chance to think about those ethical and professional issues that you may need to keep up to date with. So one of the challenges I suppose for the supervisor is that you've got to keep up to date with them. So that you can pass on this learning to your supervisee and nowhere to get certain information. But of course, it's alright for supervisors to go you know what, I don't know that bit there, where then I will find it out. And of course, one of the key things that I think is essential in supervision is that you're able to talk about your well being in the work because this is a big deal for people, I think I'll do a whole episode about wellbeing of supervisees. In their work, it was something that I did do my doctorate on, I focused on supervisee self care. And I really think that well being I kind of agree with the Milne and Reiser's perspective that we need to have supportive supervision. And there are all sorts of issues that can come up when someone is trying to address their well being in supervision. But it's really important that we have that space, because we all know about things called burnout, there are other issues around vicarious trauma in the work and how the work might affect you. So again, supervision is a place where we need to have the space to have a look at all of these issues. And then of course, fundamentally, we have supervision to be able to work with our clients. So in some respects, it offers a form of protection to clients, it offers a form of that professional gatekeeping, like I said that we need to make sure we're working ethically and professionally in helping others. So this was a bit of a whistlestop tour about what supervision is. And I hope you've got more of an understanding of how it might work. And to help clarify some of the nuts and bolts of supervision. For those that are in the therapeutic professions,

we often have supervision that lasts for an hour and a half per month. And I've always questioned why it needs to be that amount of time and kind of who decided that amount of time. And so I've still got a few queries. And I'm slightly curious about how that might evolve when we take supervision further, so kind of watch this space. And let's see how that evolves. But often, if you're having one to one supervision, it will be either might have supervision online, or it might be face to face. And you'll have that time and supervision to discuss you, your client work, global issues, your personal professional development, strengths and weaknesses, everything, everything I've covered today. And really, like I say, I think that supervision needs to be available across the helping professions. So if you're someone who helps with this as part of your role, and you're not having supervision, I would kind of ask whoever's in charge, why you don't have it. And if you are one of the ones in charge, I would put it to the staff about having some sort of space where you can have a look at your

professional practice. So if you're helping others, whether that's paid or voluntary or anything like that, please seek out supervision so that you can have a space about the work that you do, who you are, how it all gets mixed up in between and so that you can carry on helping others. Thanks for listening today. I hope this one has been useful for you hope it's started to answer some questions that you may have around what supervision is and please do get in touch. My details are on all the Episode notes. Please get in touch and I'd love to hear your thoughts and the bits of supervision that you're interested in me covering so be great to hear from you. And I'll see you next time.