



Supervision for School Staff

When I joined Jennifer at Bridge the Gap Child Mental Health Ltd in early 2019 it quickly came to my attention that supervision was not a recognised requirement for school staff; this shocked me. As a registered mental health nurse I receive quality clinical supervision at least monthly and I could not do my job without it. It is a sounding board, a safe space, a place to reflect and a place where I have, over the years leaned on to get me through some of the most difficult points of my career.

According to the NHS 'People First' Guidelines (2018) clinical supervision is the process which enables you as a professional to reflect on your experiences in practice. Developing you both professionally and personally and to support your management of complex situations associated with the care, treatment and engagement of people in your care.

So why would this not be available for all school staff across the UK and beyond? It is imperative that school staff are supported throughout their career in both their professional capacity and personally – they are dealing with the most vulnerable of our society – our children.

When talking with school staff that I come in to contact with at Bridge the Gap, not one of them feel fully supported, not one of them feel heard, not one of them have experienced a safe, reflective space for supportive conversation to be had and each one of them have dealt with incredibly stressful, difficult scenarios on a day to day basis. What is in place for school staff when they are dealing with a classroom full of children, who are not just 1 year apart from each other but potentially as neuro diverse as 5 years apart? Teachers are expected to meet the demand of an increasingly pressuring system without a space to consider the effect of this on their own mental health – and this includes teachers, teaching assistants, midday supervisors, safeguarding leads, senior leadership teams, in fact every member of school staff who has interactions with our young people.



It is of no surprise that within the UK every 1 in 83 of our teachers are off work currently with long term 'stress' (Teaching Union, 2019). This figure has increased year on year by 5% since this research was conducted 7 years ago. According to the unions, at present across the UK 4000 teachers are off sick with stress, anxiety and depression. I imagine this figure is even higher when we consider those teachers who are off sick with physical complaints which are most likely related to mental health concerns. This is worrying but I am not surprised. Our teachers face a more demanding curriculum, bigger class sizes, younger aged children starting school, trauma, safeguarding needs, additional needs, wide neuro-diversity within classrooms, parent support, demand to meet a 'behaviour system' that doesn't work and that they don't feel comfortable with, let alone the fact that we are truly in a mental health crisis and our young people lie at the heart of it. According to teacher union research "School staff routinely work a 60 hour week; teachers work more unpaid overtime than any other profession" (2018).

Teachers need a space to reflect on all of this and clinical supervision can begin to provide this space; to support school staff in accessing a space for reflection, career guidance, and a supportive environment to offload. If teachers were given supervision monthly; research shows us that staff absence rates reduce, teachers feel more supported, workload seems more manageable, children's achievements increase and most importantly children and teachers report their mental health as improved (Leeds Beckett University, 2019). This is incredible evidence-based results—so let's give our teachers supervision.

"Supervision holds the child/young person at the centre of the supervision working alliance but meets the support needs of the educator too, through a boundaried, confidential, regular supervision space for reflection, enquiry and challenge." (Leeds Beckett University, 2019)

I feel passionately about the need for supervision to be delivered to our school staff; the ultimate aim is for effective supervision to be provided for all our school staff across the UK. I have to start somewhere, so I have recently been delivering this to schools within Derby City.



I have gained feedback on this as a process and the results of this show us all too clearly that effective, regular supervision is imperative to our teacher’s mental health and therefore that of children’s. The following are quotes taken during review sessions with teaching staff in a local school last week:

“Supervision has given me the opportunity to have time to reflect on the way I manage my own mental health; as a result I have found the courage to speak to my colleagues and also visit my GP and say that I am not OK and need some support.”

“I’ve really enjoyed a space to talk, to reflect on how I manage situations in school with children who are struggling.”

“I feel listened to, valued and supported.”

“All teachers should have this space; it is non-judgmental and safe”

Table to explore what supervision is and is not:

What Supervision is:	What Supervision is not:
A supportive, guiding role incorporating coaching and/or mentoring	Therapy/Counselling
A reflective space for both professional and personal development	A management tool
A place to be listened to and heard	A place for criticism/judgement
Non-judgmental	A gossip/chat
Confidential	Opinionated

If you wish to discuss the delivery of supervision in your school, please get in touch:

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