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This training is designed to promote the use of peer supervision in high stress environments such as child welfare.
Peer supervision usually entails a group of organized professionals with the same knowledge, skill levels, and status. However, there are many different models of peer supervision which will be discussed later in this presentation. The main idea of a peer supervision group is the lack of a defined leader. The peer supervision group meets regularly to discuss many of the same topics that can be discussed in individual supervision such as challenges in the profession, self-exploration, diversity and culture, new interventions and solutions, and ethical dilemmas or situations in the workplace.

Note to Trainees: Peer supervision is not the use of a supervisor in a group setting, nor group supervision. It is important to make this distinction because peer supervision has its own benefits and challenges. It is not uncommon to have a peer supervision group that may bring in a supervisor or consultant from time to time but the main work is done by a group of professionals exploring together the same topics that would be explored in individual supervision.
Psychodynamic: This model focuses on human interactions. It examines the relationships between clients and workers, workers and workers, and workers and supervisors. In the peer supervision setting, psychodynamic group work would focus on the interactions of the group members and the interactions of the group members with the clients. This approach can use video-tapes or audio-recordings to look at the interactions between the worker and the client. Group members’ interactions are also studied in group work for full self-exploration.

Developmental Model: This model focuses on how a group proceeds through stages: the beginning, middle, and ending phases. The group members can talk about the stages of their group work and evaluate their stages. This approach can also be applied to working with clients as the client and worker go through stages together.

Role Centered Model: Lassiter (2008) suggests a model of peer supervision that examines the roles of the group members and the roles of the client. Before the discussion or presentation of a case, group members are assigned roles or characters to pay attention to during the presentation of the case. “These roles can be chosen and assigned by group supervisor, supervisee presenter, or other group members. Options include the counselor, the client, a present or non-present significant other, client or counselor nonverbal behaviors, counseling process, and theoretical perspectives or descriptive metaphors of different aspects of the process” (p. 167).
There are many benefits to peer supervision. When members come together to do the work they are able to network and professionally develop an identity in the field. They meet with other professionals to feel validated, discuss difficult situations, self-explore, and learn different interventions and perspectives. This promotes support as members feel they are a part of group. Peer supervision counteracts burnout and social isolation as members are supported and feel group cohesion.

The members also learn to practice supervisory skills for when they become supervisors in the field. They are able to do this because they practice giving and receiving feedback, practice contracting, boundary management and the demand for work. Perhaps the most important benefit of peer supervision is the lack of a power struggle. In individual supervision the power struggle is widely discussed and explored. However, in peer supervision that dynamic is eliminated because the professionals are on the same level. The lack of the power struggle creates trusting environment where members talk about their mistakes and feelings in the field.

The end result of peer supervision is self-efficacy, trust, and self-esteem of the group members. And to apply the parallel process these feelings of self confidence and self worth will be presented in the work with the clients.
With any group interaction there are challenges to be faced.

*Staying on task* is a common challenge. For example, dialogue may easily be taken over by complaints or gossip. It is important for all group members to understand that work needs to be done in the peer supervision group.

*Group member interactions* can also get in the way of the peer group experience. Members might not be able to get along. Sometimes there may be a lack of appropriate communication or conflict resolution skills. Members may also have hidden agendas or they may not take the group seriously. These group interactions need to be addressed or the group will most likely disband.

*Inappropriate contracting* is usually the cause of most challenges in supervision. If the group does not discuss the structure or policies of the group then members will not be on the same page as one another. Likewise, inappropriate evaluation of the contract will cause more problems. It is important for group members to evaluate the group contract to see what is working, what is not working, and how it can be handled.

Lastly, authors like Counselmann (2004) discuss feelings of *shame or guilt* in the peer supervision experience. For example, if the group never criticizes each other or provides feedback then the group is not serving its purpose. The group members will not be encouraged to take risks or provide self disclosure. Therefore, the group may feel shame or guilt because they are resistant to open up and therefore appear superficial. Addressing shame and guilt provides for a more real peer supervision experience.
Literature recommends that a peer supervision group encompass four to six professionals. However, some researchers even recommend a group as large as ten to fifteen members to provide even more perspectives. It is really up to the starting group members how many other professionals they want to include in their peer supervision. No matter the number of members it is recommended to have some form of interview process to learn more about why other professionals want to join the group, how the group should be structured, and what the professionals are hoping to get out of the group.

There are different formats for the peer supervision group as well. Counselman (2004) suggest a leaderless group in which all the members take responsibility for the group work. However, others like Thomasgard (2003) suggest that group utilize rotating presenters or co-moderators to run the group sessions. This provides more opportunity to practice supervisory skills and is a more structured and fair way to present cases. Once again, it is up to the professionals in the group to determine how they would like the group sessions to be structured.

Lastly, contracting is also important for positive group dynamics. How will lateness be handled? When is it time for one member to speak? What happens with attendance? What will the group do if one member is monopolizing? How will silence be handled? These are important to think about ahead of time so the group members understand the policies and procedures of the group. Evaluation is another key factor that needs to be incorporated in a successful group session. How is the group working for the members? What is going well? What isn’t going well? What needs to be changed or modified?
Child welfare is a high stress environment. There are always many dynamics and factors in play with each family. Therefore, workers in child welfare need the support of the administration and other co-workers to decrease burnout and isolation. Peer supervision is an effective model that can be used to promote the support, self-efficacy, and self confidence needed for child welfare workers. Peer supervision is cost-effective, and it saves time and money because each worker does not have to take time for individual supervision. Akhurst (2006) even advises that an inclusion of both individual supervision and peer supervision would be helpful for workers. All in all, peer supervision is a beneficial way to get the support and empathy needed to decrease burnout and social isolation.
In any helping profession, continued learning is valued and promoted. In child protective social work, continued education is needed to provide the best services to families. Peer supervision upholds this value by allotting time for group members to get together to seek support and learn new interventions. Peer supervision allows for continued education through learning from others. According to Thomasgard (2003) some peer supervision groups are accredited and count as continuation credits. Each state has different requirements of continued education credits, but peer supervision can provide a way to get continued education and learning.

The social work profession also has ethical standards that professionals need to meet. Confidentiality of clients in peer supervision needs to be upheld as clients situations are discussed among members who may not be on a need-to-know basis. Changing names and places in peer supervision is needed to keep the identities of clients confidential.

Lastly, the group members should know their rights and responsibilities in the peer supervision group (also known as informed consent). By outlining their duties and rights the group members will know what the peer supervision will be about and can further commit to the group work. An example of this is letting a group member know they have the right to leave the peer supervision group and it is not required. The peer supervision process will go more smoothly if the group members know their rights and responsibilities.
Consider how you would handle these situations.

While there is not one perfect answer, it is valuable to be prepared for these and similar situations when working in a peer supervision group.
Thank you for participating in this training!
Available readings on peer supervision