

SUPERVISION AND MENTORING IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES



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Contents	
Introduction: thinking from “Out of the Box”	5
Wisdom from the Field	6
Shifting Paradigms in Child Welfare	8
Shift in Supervision Paradigm: “Leading from One Step Behind”	12
Challenges for supervisors	
Looking ahead and paving the way	
Supervisory tasks	
Assumptions of supervision and management	
What and How of Supervision:	21
Wisdom from the field: Supervisors share their experiences	
How were you oriented to your position of supervisor?	
Wisdom from the field	
How did you learn to be a good supervisor?	
Wisdom and tips from the field	
What would your workers say you do that’s helpful to them?	
Wisdom and tips from the field	
What are team-building activities you do currently or have done?	
Wisdom and tips from the field	
How would your workers rate your job performance?	
Wisdom from the field: worker evaluation of supervisor	
How do you know your workers are doing well in the field?	
Suppose there is a training manual for supervisors?	
If you were to participate in an ongoing peer-mentoring group	
What features would it have to offer to keep you involved?	
Wisdom from the field: Peer support group	
Some Useful Tools for “Not-Knowing” Skills	39
Importance of collaborative language	
Skills for goal negotiation	
Skills for exception exploration	
Supervisor feedback: Power of compliments	
Scaling questions	
Relationship questions	
Challenging workers while being supportive	
Worker empowerment	
Strategies for Managing Difficult People	72
Strength-Based Case Conference Protocol	93
Peer Mentoring	98

Introduction: Thinking from “Out of the Box”

The University of Wisconsin-Green Bay received funding from the Children’s Bureau, Dept. of Health and Human Services in order to develop an innovative approach to supervision that reflects the shift in child welfare practices as well as supervisor training. We wanted this project to be consistent with the goal of the funding, as well as being reflective of new ways to train supervisors in the field of child welfare. We recognize that supervisors in the field of child welfare are the most knowledgeable and experienced experts on what to teach and how to influence their workers and their colleagues since this is what they do day in and day out. This document reflects current supervisors’ voices as well as the new and useful techniques that chart the direction of changes in child welfare. We address two dimensions of supervisors’ tasks: training of workers and training or mentoring of other supervisors.

Wisdom from the Field

The Transfer of Learning project invited child welfare supervisors to participate in this innovative approach to generating a supervisor mentoring and training model that is based on their ideas and field tested in their real work situations with their workers and new supervisors in child welfare. The initial group of six supervisors, whose supervisory experiences ranged from 3 months to 17 years, volunteered from the Northeastern part of Wisconsin and they met for total of 8 times over a period of 8 months under the guidance of Insoo Kim Berg and John Cole. Following the action research format (Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and Small (1995), the supervisors were first asked to describe their successful efforts to master supervisory skills, their successful experiences, the strategies used, and the “what” and “how” of the process of becoming competent as a supervisor.

The discussions in which the supervisors shared their successes and failures were enormously useful to the participating supervisors themselves, as well as to the consulting team, since the supervisors seldom have a chance to discuss their work with their colleagues “in the trenches” with such candor and openness. Not only did this group become a think tank, but it also functioned to build a network and a support group. Transcripts from each meeting were used to pick up themes that emerged so that the supervisors had a chance to review, revise and clarify their thoughts and practices throughout. Then the discussion leaders added more questions to expand their ideas about how to reach out to other supervisors as well

as to collaborate with their workers. We also solicited their input as to what topics and format the group wanted included in this training manual. We believe this is truly a collaborative effort to pull practice wisdom together.

Shifting Paradigms in Child Welfare

The field of child welfare is going through a significant philosophical and paradigmatic shift. Practices that are based on this new view of the customers (parents) as partners in forming and shaping a desirable state of their family, for their children and themselves, are increasingly advocated by the Children's Bureau through federal legislation and practice standards. When parents are treated with respect and are asked to participate as partners in change, they are more likely to raise their children with respect for their individual needs and differences. Many researches also indicate that there are wide gaps between workers' perception of services provided and client perception of services received (Family Independence Agency of Michigan, 2002). From client and worker focus groups conducted in Michigan in 2001 and 2002, it was sobering to learn that both clients and workers had similar ideas and descriptions of what best practice in child welfare should look like. Workers have good ideas on how to provide best practice services to their clients and are learning more about how our clients want to be treated. It is becoming increasingly clear that we need to listen to clients' and workers' voices and their ideas about how we can better serve the children we want to protect. At the same time, workers need a supportive, learning environment so that they feel they are growing professionally so they feel they are growing professionally and are prepared for the evolving philosophy of best practice. This shift comes not only

from common sense knowledge about motivation to change but also from many years of experience in the field.

These changes have significant implications for how child welfare workers and their supervisors think about and carry out their daily tasks. We know that for those who need to change, motivation for change does not “well up” upon demand, nor in a threatening environment. The field has slowly but surely become aware that any successful and long-lasting change in clients can only come from a collaborative stance between the client and the worker. Many experienced workers know that when change is demanded, clients make the least amount of change they can make for as short a time as possible. On the contrary, when it is the clients’ idea or wish to change, they make as much changes as they can, and the changes are long lasting. This concept of forming a collaborative partnership with clients is a drastic shift away from the deficit perspective that has dominated the field of child welfare from the beginning.

In recent years “the strengths perspective” (Salleeby, 1997); Berg & Kelly, (2000); Turnell & Edwards (1999) is increasingly being accepted in the field. Practitioners are expected to view their major task as forming a collaborative relationship in which clients play a major role in reshaping their own future, according to their own vision of a better life for themselves.

This philosophical shift is based on research data, changing views of helping relationships, and a recognition that the long-held deficit view of clients that defined services from the early days of the child welfare movement is ineffective, unnecessarily intrusive, disruptive to the families, and culturally insensitive. There

is recognition that the basic philosophy of working with clients must be based on an assumption of respect for the client's strengths and competence, as well as maximizing the clients' wishes and ability to change so they can become responsible for their own children's safety and welfare within their own culture and values. Initial piloting of these new approaches in child welfare seems to bear this out (Michigan Family Independence Agency, Partnership for Safety Project, 2002). The child welfare field has reached the conclusion that governments generally make poor parents for the majority of children in need. Children thrive best growing up in a supportive environment, surrounded by familiar and caring families, neighborhoods, and communities. Supporting and strengthening families so they can take care of their own children is the most humane, effective, and empowering way to nurture children in need. This paradigm should be the central philosophy and a normative practice in everyday child welfare work.

Many experienced child welfare workers know that in order for any change to be long lasting, it must be based on clients having a voice in shaping the outcome. They must understand the client's view of how changes impact them and how changes must be related to the client's vision of how they want their future to be. It has become increasingly clear that the true meaning of client "empowerment" does not come from having something handed out to the client, but by asking them to participate in shaping and producing changes on their own in ways that are meaningful to the client. Therefore, rather than believing that "compliance" produces change, the field is moving in the direction of encouraging and promoting collaboration as the most respectful, pragmatic, and empowering way to work with

clients (Berg & Kelly, 2000). In this way we create changes that are positive for families and for society. This manual attempts to follow a similar philosophy in training and learning about becoming a competent and successful supervisor.

Shift in Supervision Paradigm: “Leading from One-Step Behind”

We believe that learning is a self-achievement. We cannot cause learning to take place, therefore, “education” is not in the first place a transfer of knowledge but to accompany learning.

Unknown source

The next logical step toward encouraging this paradigm shift in client-worker relationship should look at the parallel that exists in the relationship between the supervisor and the worker. In fact, there is a shift in the way we view the role of supervisors that reflects a change from a view of super-vision (superior vision) to a view of the supervisor as mentor, coach, teacher, and many other functions. Rather than thinking from a superior view of things, it is a more modest approach to supervision. Peter Cantwell and Sophie Holmes (1994) of Melbourne, Australia have coined the phrase that best describes supervision activities as “leading from one-step behind.” Berg & Kelly (2000) and DeJong & Berg (2002 2e) have expanded this concept further to child welfare interventions.

Instead of relying on hierarchical roles defined by legislation, organizational structure, or union rules based on traditional authoritarian structures, supervisory activities should reflect these changing views. When supervisor-supervisor relationships are based on mutual respect, collaboration, and a willingness to learn

from each other, the culture of the supervisor's unit is more likely to undergo positive changes. The supervisor's thoughts turn to "what does the worker already know how to do, and what new skills need be added in order to do the job at hand?" For example, in one of the child welfare agencies I consulted with some years ago, as the workers participated in revision of their child protective and foster care program protocols and paperwork, workers began to ask, "What about empowering us? We've been working hard to empower our clients for months now, and we wonder, 'Who empowers us?' We do not feel we are treated with respect and collaboratively as we are trained to do with our clients!" It is time we make sure that we model the attitudes and skills in supervision that we want workers to demonstrate with clients and not fall into the pattern of "Do as I say; not as I do."

Challenges for Supervisors

Traditionally the route to becoming a supervisor in child welfare was through promotion of a competent "super-worker." New supervisors received little formal training, under the assumption that being a good supervisor required the same set of skills that made him or her a "super-worker." Frequently, the only "training" they received to become a supervisor consisted of modeling their own supervisor, who also modeled herself after her own supervisor, and so on. This frequently resulted in perpetuating bad supervisory style, without much thinking involved. The assumption was, "we always have done it this way, therefore it must

be the way to do it.” Fortunately, many administrators recognize that working with clients and working with supervisees is similar in many ways, but is also very different in many ways. The need for more rigorous training of supervisors has become much more accepted in principle.

Any supervisor who has been recently promoted to a supervisory position from the rank of worker can testify that all these changes in the paradigm shift means coping with a great deal of change. Having been indoctrinated for many years in a traditional “problem-solving” approach of identifying the deficits in clients and trying to find matching solutions to problems (DeJong & Berg, 2001), this new paradigm begins with the worker asking for the client’s opinion of what kind of services he or she needs in order to make her or his children’s life better and safer. For example, there are child welfare agencies that use the term “success plan,” to replace “assessment,” which has a long historical association with “problem and deficit inventory.” No wonder workers were frequently overwhelmed. When the workers identify and categorize client deficits, weakness, and mistakes, the logical next step is to correct them. Since the worker identified the client’s problems, the person who is most eager to take corrective measure is the worker, while the client often passively agreed to the worker’s decisions and waited for the worker to stop “bothering” them.

One can easily see the problem of client motivation and investment in making necessary changes that are likely to be long lasting, when “solutions” were imposed on them by their workers. Many experienced workers and supervisors know that often clients who comply with the system’s demands end up going

through “durational change,” that is, the client changes while involved in the system but as soon as the pressure is off and contact is terminated, they revert back to their old ways. This is quite disheartening and discouraging to the workers and supervisors as well.

Looking Ahead and Paving the Way

In many ways, this is not an easy time to be a supervisor. At the same time, this is also an exciting, stimulating, and mind-stretching time to be supervisor. We are coming to recognize that the “same old, same old” approach will not do any longer. It is time to think and behave “out of the box.” The outcome of such change is that both workers and supervisors will learn the challenges and excitement of collaboration between client-worker, and worker-supervisor. Rather than being a “super-visor” with “a know-it-all,” or “see-it-all” posture, now the supervisor can “lead from one-step behind.” There is pleasure and joy in watching an inexperienced worker transform into a confident, thoughtful, and respectful worker. By learning to utilize the experienced workers on the team, the supervisor guide workers to teach and mentor each other. They share the responsibility of agonizing through difficult decisions with their colleagues, not all alone with the supervisor as the only guide.

To help navigate this exciting and challenging journey, this manual will present some detailed steps for discussing cases and empowering workers and teams.

Supervisory Tasks

Supervisors daily fill multitude of roles and indeed are “the kings and queens of multi-tasking.” The following is a simplified list of roles filled on a daily basis identified by the supervisor focus group:

Teacher: The supervisor encourages acquisition of broadly applicable knowledge related to working with clients and also provides a “big picture.” This may involve giving information related to general casework policies or social work skills, child welfare theories, child and family development, the necessary myriad of paperwork, agency policy, ethical standards, procedures and protocols that will assist the worker to do excellent work.

Administrator: The supervisor focuses on worker’s compliance with the professional, ethical, legal, and other standards that guide the practice of child welfare. The supervisor also ensures that standards are met in the worker’s performance of duties in order to protect clients, workers, and the agency. The supervisor also must always consider the cost effectiveness of a decision, while being mindful of the unique needs of the clients. This is particularly important when considering placement of a child or a juvenile into a residential treatment center, group home, foster home, or home of a relative. The supervisor has to figure out which of the different options available will meet the needs of the child in the most economical and useful way.

Mentor: This term has gone through a great deal of change in recent years. It has been updated from an image of an “old boys’ network” focused on personal advancement of one’s career, to an emphasis on building positive relationships. In this role, the supervisor focuses on the personal development of each worker as a growing professional. The supervisor helps the worker identify and address his or her own contribution toward building a working relationship with clients, while helping the worker develop and maintain their role as a competent member of the agency and of the professional community at large.

Coach: The supervisor assists each worker’s direct work with caseloads and all tasks that are related to work with clients. The focus is on the direct provision of services to help clients achieve their casework goals. The supervisor helps the worker apply and refine clinical skills, as well as develop special areas of expertise and improve overall functioning in the organization and the community.

Team Builder: Even though this role is not emphasized enough in the literature, most participants in the focus group felt that team building is crucial to teaching and nurturing workers. The supervisor does this by recognizing and using worker’s skills as resources. New workers may be asked to seek guidance from senior staff, highlighting the knowledge and skills of veteran staff while establishing positive relationships among team members. Many workers tend to under-estimate their own influence on

each other as well as on clients. A supervisor's job is to bring this influence to their awareness and to teach skills around maximizing this social aspect for building a positive work environment.

Community Relationship Builder: The supervisor represents the agency to the community through networking and building relationships with service provider agencies, and serving as a liaison with community resources. This is particularly true in smaller communities where workers must be involved in relationship-building with the community as well. Supervisors need to be selective about resources the agency utilizes to provide the best possible services to clients.

Cheerleader: The supervisor's primary role that never changes is to be a cheerleader for individual worker as well as for the entire unit or a team. The cheerleading role is also used with superiors such as managers and administrators.

Assumptions of Supervision and Management

Everything we do is based on certain assumptions, philosophies, values, and belief systems that define the parameters of our daily work. However, from time to time, either out of old habits or because "we have always done things this way," there are routines and habitual things we do that seem to contradict our stated wishes, philosophies, or values related to service to clients. Therefore, it is important to be clear about your own beliefs about the workers you supervise, just

as you would expect your workers to do in regards to their beliefs about the clients they serve. The following section will lay out some basic assumptions we ought to hold when we begin supervising workers, and some basic assumptions child welfare workers ought to have about the parent and child they work with.

Until proven otherwise, we believe that all workers:

- Want to do a good job each and every day,
- Want to be proud of their work,
- Want to “make a difference” in a life,
- 4. Need knowledge and skills to express this motivation,
- Have reasonable “problem-solving” skills, and need to add on “solution-building” skills,
- Need to identify and enhance their own existing personal resources,
- 7. Want to feel respected by their supervisor, and will, in turn, deal with their clients in a respectful manner, who, in turn, will be more respectful to their child(ren).

Until proven otherwise, we believe all parents want to:

- be proud of their children
- protect and nurture their children
- have a positive influence on their children
- be hopeful about their children

- feel they are giving their children a good education and a chance at success in life
- hear good news about their children and what their children are good at
- feel their children's future is better than their own
- have a good relationship with their children
- feel they are good parents

Similarly, **Until proven otherwise, we believe all children want to:**

- have their parents be proud of them
- please their parents and other important adults in their life
- be accepted as a part of a social group
- be active and involved in activities with others
- be surprised and surprise others
- voice their opinions in matters that affect them
- make choices when given an opportunity.

Some might call these assumptions “blind faith,” and express fears that we might be “duped” into believing these things about clients, children, and workers. We would absolutely agree with this cautious attitude. However, the important work of social services, especially in the field of child welfare, begins with blind faith about the clients we serve and the workers we supervise. It is also based on community consensus and decisions about what are minimum standards of acceptable childcare practice, which change from time to time. It is not a hard

scientific field in which we work, but a changeable, constantly evolving set of principles and standards. What used to be a good standard of practice may no longer be considered good practice. For example, we no longer view removal of a child from their abusive parents as the only solution to a terrible situation.

Having a set of assumptions, even though they may go through changes and be modified over time, gives us some foundation for making decisions when we face gray areas that are beyond rules and regulations. As Albert Einstein said, "Theory dictates what to observe," or as someone else said: "Believing is seeing."

What and How of Supervision

Wisdom from the Field: Supervisors Share Their Experiences

In order to learn how competent supervisors became that way, we wanted to learn from them about how they achieved their current level of competency and what contributed to their learning. At the time of participation in this project, some of the participants had dual roles as supervisor and county director or deputy director, and work in small rural counties where workers and supervisors must become generalists who deliver a range of categorical services, from financial assistance to child welfare. The rest of the supervisors work in larger, semi-rural and urban areas. Following is a summary of the supervisors' questions and responses that generated wise thoughts and beliefs. They may be adapted and modified to fit your own setting and the workers you supervise.

Question: How were you oriented to your position of child welfare supervisor?

Responses to this question covered a wide spectrum, as one might easily imagine, from someone who was given two weeks to read "the blue State rule book," to another who was "given a new desk and a four-drawer filing cabinet and I became a supervisor." One supervisor who was more blunt said: "There was no break-in period: You just start, tomorrow!" Another reported how "I panicked at the awesome responsibility of making decisions of a life changing nature for families." Still another was met with "hostile attitudes of workers" and "rumor

mongering and back biting because I was their co-worker one day and the next day, I was their supervisor.”

The majority of the supervisors seem to have relied on their own personal skills and resources, such as “finding my own mentor,” and realizing that “being a supervisor requires a separate set of skills from being a worker.” Expressions ranged from “self-doubt” to someone who easily transitioned because of the heavy demands of the workload made it possible to maintain the connections within client-worker-supervisor relationships. In fact, this necessity and her willingness to pitch in during a time of worker shortage were helpful in earning the respect of her workers, because she was working side by side with them.

The helpfulness of the regional supervisors’ meeting seems to vary depending on the region, focus of the group, and size. Some participants in a smaller region found these meetings very useful. Others - especially those in a larger region -seemed to have focused more on policy changes and other bureaucratic issues, making it impossible to feel safe voicing their uncertainties and doubts about themselves as supervisors. Many said that it was helpful to have “permission not to know everything” right away.

It was sobering and humbling to listen to their lack of training and how they jumped into the water without much preparation from the upper level management. Some very thoughtful and laid back administrators offered support and latitude “to figure things out by myself” . . . “his open door policy gave me lots of room to come to him. ” Others were not so fortunate. The majority of the new supervisors took their jobs very seriously and consciously tried to make good

decisions for their workers, children, and families. However, the consensus seems to be that all new supervisors should have “a safe place and time” to step back periodically, sort things out, and ask “What am I doing and why am I doing this?” Many explained how they went through a wide range of self-examination with such questions as, “Do I have what it takes to be a supervisor?” They recognized that “line staff mentality and what it means to transition to supervisor” can be very difficult. Others felt “energized by hearing from a client that you have helped change their life in a positive direction” and gained job satisfaction from implementing policies that have made it easier for the workers to do their jobs better.

Question: How did you learn to be a good supervisor?

- My workers trained me. My job was to listen to them and learn from them.
- I looked at what the issues we (the worker and I) are facing and always look at what is the best way to meet the end goal that workers and families want to achieve. I realized that my job is to facilitate these workers’ tasks, that my job is to help them the best I can so they can do their best work. I try to keep an eye on what the end goal is, both the worker’s and the client’s.
- A determination and a tenacity to hang in there with a vision, helps a great deal.

- Modeling relationships because it is all about relationships:
 - How not be a victim, e.g. not taking verbal abuse from clients
 - Live everyday what you tell your clients.
- “The way you think about something is everything,” because it defines what and how you do things.
- Knowing what you are here for, and who you are, is very important because it tells you what is important and what is not.
- Some workers do not recognize their own successes or their client’s. For example, one client did not drink for 2 weeks and I had to remind the worker about this.
- When workers complain, e.g. about case assignment, I explain my views in a calm manner without being defensive.
- I see myself as a team member, therefore, I use ‘we” a lot and mean it.

When a worker was extremely anxious about a court hearing, but kept her cool in spite of a confrontational hearing, I reminded her how well she conducted herself because I was at the hearing to support her. I will “team” a case and take the lead role with a worker in order to teach.
- When there is a high level of conflict between the family and the worker, I try to protect the worker and take the brunt of the family’s anger by meeting with them.
- The general consensus is that workers like having the supervisor involved in their cases because they are assured that what they are doing

is on track. Supervisors can ask some tough questions to the family as well, since she has not been involved from the beginning of the case. All agreed that supervisor presence in tense or conflictual situations can be very helpful to their staff.

- Some supervisors worried that they were “micro-managing” while others thought it is necessary at times because some workers say that just giving them the task and deadline is helpful. “I am aware of the union environment, therefore, I always say to such workers, ‘Since you said this is helpful to you, I am giving you a deadline to get this work done’.” It makes it clear that I am not doing this to everybody but only because this worker asked for the structure and the deadline. What seems to be a helpful stance to one worker can be annoying and overly intrusive to another. Of course this is true of clients also. Consensus is that it needs to be tailored to fit the needs of the individual worker.
- General consensus seems to be that budget constraints and federal laws have helped change the culture of child welfare in the past 10 years. Now there is more interest in seeing family as the solution to children’s problems and that removing a child does not end the problem for the child but only changes from one problem to another. Judges are also more careful to look at what kind of effort has been made to keep the children at home, or return the child home sooner. Changes in federal law also accounts for this push and most supervisors seem to view this as a positive trend for children and families.

“Wisdom from the field”

- Be willing to learn from your workers.
- Supervision is a mutual learning and teaching process, that is, it is “top-down” as well as “bottom-up.” You model this behavior to your workers so they can learn to interact with their clients in similar manner, so ultimately the parent will learn to listen to their child.
- Maintain a “curious” posture instead of a judgmental one, thus see yourself as a learner. This stance makes it possible to be respectful to those we may disagree with. Remember you model the best practice to your workers, so that they will behave in similar manner with their clients.
- Look at things from the supervisee’s perspective. This approach cuts through much of your difficulty with “resistive” workers.

Question: *What would your workers say you do that’s helpful?*

- Open door policy, I’m available on the spot, and they trust what I say.

- My respect for them and building credibility by treating them as professionals.
- I listen to (at times, solicit) their ideas because they often forget their own successes and while they tell me about own successes, it serves as reminder.
- I don't have all the answers, especially about legal questions, but I know where to go to find the answers, and I get the information they need as soon as possible.
- Hold workers accountable (e.g. check the files) but appreciate what they do, even if they make mistakes; look for what to do instead of finding fault or blame them.
- Appreciate their difficult job - removing kids, dealing with parents, being exposed to extreme poverty is very hard for the workers. Allowing them to debrief following a difficult encounter with clients is helpful.
- Offering alternatives to how the worker sees things is helpful. **For example**, one worker had a particularly difficult encounter with a client and her anxiety reached a point where she wanted to go home at mid-day. So, I first normalized her reactions saying, "Anybody who experienced what you just went through today would feel the same way, and I wonder if going home right now would be like letting your feeling take on a life of its own and take over you?" She decided to stay on the job and learned to distract herself and she felt OK by the end of the day.

- I try to show different means to the same goal, but always discussing with them where they want to end up and how one might there (strategies).

“Wisdom from the field”

- Make sure to ask “What is the outcome I want here?” Once you know where you are going, then it makes it easier to know what is important to pay attention to and what is not.
- It is your job to hold workers accountable for the job they need to do, but it is HOW you do it that makes a big difference. Not in a confrontational manner but in a professional manner, that is, politely and respectfully.
- It is OK to not have answers to every situation that arise, but it is important to know where to go look for answers.
- Be willing to look at difficult situations from a different perspective, that is, from “out of the box.” Often workers and clients see things from inside the same box, looking from the same perspective over and over again. Therefore, it is less likely they will see the small opening to a new view. The reason why this is important is that a slightly different

perspective allows a different way to move toward solution. **For example**, if a supervisor sees the worker as having some potential for learning, then he/she is more likely to be patient with the worker who makes a mistake and gives direction to the worker in such a way that the worker feels encouraged, instead of feeling scolded. Big difference between the two.

Question: What are team-building activities you do currently or have done?

- Have a basic structure for the unit, i.e. meet every morning to review new referrals; your office should be physically located near the workers so that they have easy access to you; promote birthday celebrations with a luncheon; promote a healthy balance between work and personal life for everybody in the unit; and neutralize any negative influence in the unit as soon as possible.
- Gather as much information as possible from the staff before making a decision that affects them.
- Redirecting workers to the agency mission when there is a need to make schedule changes or other adjustments.
- Allow for flexi-time, preferably arranged by workers, providing a full schedule of staff coverage.

□□□□□ realize how much workers value supervisor fairness in everything

I do such as case assignments, time spent with supervisor, personal relationships, and so on, so I am very conscious of this with everybody.

- I make a conscious effort to present experienced workers as experts in certain areas. **For example**, I might say to a worker, “Let’s walk over there and ask Tom/Ann about this.” This gives experienced workers credit for what they know and do well.
- I try to find ways to promote workers to act as “consultants” to foster care, the delinquency unit, or other programs.
- I try to use the word “team” instead of “unit” because I have no need to be a “boss.”
- Instead of saying “you have to do this or that . . .,” I usually say, “the statute says this . . .” to take myself out of the issue and not make it a personal decision.
- Some workers demand a firm hand and more guidelines while others are quite autonomous. Individualized approaches seem to work best.
- When there is a conflict between workers on the team, I try to deal with both parties at the same time so there is no misunderstanding or impression of any bias toward one or the other.
- Some team building activities we have done are:
 - developed a team logo
 - developed a mission statement

- developed team goals that we track monthly and report on how we are achieving the goals.
- There were many discussions about worker-worker conflicts, but the conclusion was that co-workers are able to get things done even though they may not like each other. When upset or angry with staff, one can always focus on the tasks at hand because within the civil service system, we may not have a choice about staff and must work with personnel who are assigned to us.
- Important task of the supervisor is to balance two views: the big picture of (1). Why we are here? and (2). What is the outcome we want from this task or encounter? Supervisors must take steps to achieve this big picture of “why” and “what.” Transmitting this attitude to workers are what makes the supervisory tasks different from casework tasks.

“Wisdom from the field”

- Build structure in the office, such as the same routine, time, and place to provide predictable routine and parameters for workers. People are creatures of habit and we rely on a reliable and predictable routine.
- Always collaborate with staff, especially in those areas that affect them personally, without promising they will get their way.
- Team building takes more time and effort up front, but it will make your job much easier once the culture of the team is established.
- Use of language is important. It is always about how to say more than about what to say. Choose words carefully – use collaborative words often (see section on language use).

- The more you give credit to others, the more it comes back to you. Be generous with giving credit to others.
- Not everybody has to like each other in order to work together. Always focus on the common goal, rather than emphasizing differences.
- Always present the big picture or the job to workers as well as the details. They need to see how their details fit into the big picture of the agency mission, department goals, and so on.

Question: How would your workers rate your job performance as a supervisor?

This question to the supervisors was phrased as, "Suppose I were to ask your workers to rate you on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 stands for the best supervisor they have ever had, and 1 stands for the worst supervisor they have ever met, or "a supervisor from hell." What number would they give you?

- 6, 7, fluctuates between 6 to 8, 6 to 7. Some participants believed that all supervisors should be rated at a minimum of 7 most of the time.
- "Most workers in my unit would rate me high following the termination of an employee who was destructive to the morale of the unit (who, of course, would rate me very low) because they saw me taking action for the welfare of the unit."
- Many felt that supervisors are often placed in a difficult position because they are required by administration to support unpopular mandates with

the staff. At times, they would like me to advocate for staff's position but to do so could be contradicting the administration. Others felt that supervisors should receive a high rating if one delivers the message in a professional manner. It is all in "how" a supervisor delivers the news - by being respectful of the staff. What is important is how the supervisor helps staff deal with news and changes affecting them.

"Wisdom from the field"

- Even though it may be difficult to hear the worker's evaluation of you as a supervisor, it is commonly expected that a supervisor needs to know where s/he stands. Using a scaling question indicates it is on a continuum, not an absolute negative/positive split.
- Truly collaborative supervision means both parties involved come with open minds to learn from each other. The best possible way to demonstrate this is by doing it. Ask their opinion of how you could improve as a supervisor. Ask them and then listen to them.

- It is driven home again the importance of the way in which a supervisor presents “bad news” or unpopular mandates to workers – with tact, respect for your workers and with professionalism.
- Always looking out for the greater good of the unit/team when making decisions, as well as being fair, earns workers’ respect.

Question: How do you know your workers are doing well in the field?

- When I don’t hear any complaints from the community or clients.
- When I am out in the community, I hear from law enforcement, other agencies, schools, medical services, and various groups.
- Conducting family conferencing, concurrent planning sessions, and shadowing workers, or pitching in when there is a shortage of workers.

Suppose there is a training manual for supervisors, what would you suggest we include in it?

- A clear statement about why it is important to read this training manual
- Small volume - we have no time to read a big manual.
- Use:
 - bullet point format
 - real life examples
 - ways to incorporate the information into supervisor’s daily life
 - ways to deal with “difficult” staff

- email network that has an ability to network with other supervisors
 - develop a resource directory, and have it on computer in a streamlined manner
 - provide instructions for requesting an independent investigation from another county
 - design it in such a way that it promotes relationships with each other
- Indicate mutual learning between supervisors and workers
 - Think of this as a help for day to day events - something that is accessible and supportive of supervisors
 - Reading of statutes and interpretations of how they apply to daily work can vary from county to county – it is useful for supervisors to know this.

If you were to participate in an ongoing peer-mentoring group what features would it have to offer to keep you involved?

- Be able to talk openly about personnel issues, tough cases or difficult employees such as an unmotivated worker, scheduling issues and so on, that we all deal with everyday.
- Need to hear the experiences of others in dealing with various supervisory issues.

- Divide the session into two parts. Have the first part focus on generic supervision issues and the second part on practice issues – perhaps have separate break out groups (CPS, delinquency, foster care, etc).
- Opportunity to hear feedback on my own decisions when I encountered difficult or unusual situations and/or workers.
- Safe, small enough group so that we can discuss our mistakes and failures as well without feeling embarrassed or intimidated.
- Almost every participant wants to have the time to take a step back and think about things since the job is so complex and there is no manual for management of people.

“Wisdom from the field”: forming a peer support group

- Deeply touching to hear how everyone wants to do a good job and wants to learn from experience, not from theoretical or hypothetical issues, but from real life situations.
- Small, safe enough group where they can let down their hair and get some practical, useful ideas.

- Supervisors have needs too, and they are not any different from anybody else's – have a sense of mission about their job and know that they are doing their best under a very difficult and pressured circumstances.
- All supervisors want to know that they are doing the best job they can do which is fair, helpful, and provides the best possible services to clients.
- Supervisors need administrative support just as the workers need it from their supervisors.

Would you be willing to volunteer to be a facilitator to begin a peer mentoring group in your region?

- I need to know the time commitment – once every quarter is suggested.
- Concerns about workload demands in the agency and having time to coordinate logistical details (setting agenda, sending out reminders, keeping track, etc).
- Will need administrative support that this is a valuable way for the supervisor to spend time.
- There was general consensus that peer mentoring is an excellent idea, and is badly needed. However, most participants were reluctant to take on more than they can handle, especially since they were not confident their administrators would value it and support such activities by making room in their schedule to do so.

Some Useful Tools for “Not-Knowing” Skills

This term, “not-knowing skills,” sounds contradictory at first glance. However, it is a rather profound idea to ponder. It takes a considerable degree of self confidence and skills to adopt a posture of “not-knowing.” It means that

workers and supervisors in their daily dealings with their clients and workers have the ability to demonstrate their willingness and humility to learn and listen to the other person's ideas, wishes, and competencies. It is a respectful approach to take in everything

we do. It requires our ability to set aside our expertise gained from years of experience, hard earned knowledge and skills, be open to listening to the other person's position and then to start to collaborate. Out of this willingness to collaborate, third and fourth options often emerge, which is the beauty of collaboration. As the saying goes, truly "two heads are better than one," especially when it involves dealing with the complexity and unpredictability of human minds and emotions. In addition to being creative, new ideas that emerge from such collaboration are owned by both parties, eliminating what is commonly described as "passive-aggressive" behavior. It is human nature to be invested in ideas we generate, and to resent being told (at times, forcefully or under coercion) what to do.

Taking this "not-knowing" posture does not mean that workers or clients have unlimited free rein to do whatever they want. Within the limits of what is allowed, which is true for everyone and everything about life, there are many areas where participants can negotiate and create, as long as one arrives at the desired outcome that society, clients, and workers can agree is positive for the child in need. This is the true empowerment of workers and clients.

There are some useful techniques that demonstrate the "not-knowing" skills that that will reflect and demonstrate your spirit and wish to collaborate with your

workers, and worker with their clients. As the following examples of dialogues show, workers can be taught to use the same “not-knowing” skills with clients as well. Here the focus is on supervisors’ interactions with workers in the following segments:

Importance of collaborative language

Skills for goal exploration

Skills for exploration of exceptions

Supervisor feedback: Power of compliments and acknowledgement

Scaling Questions

Relationship Questions

Importance for Collaborative Language

All of our daily work is done with words, whether we talk to clients, workers, colleagues, or to administrators, on the phone, in person, or even by email. We use words to make changes happen, to negotiate differences, and to make important decisions. Talking is the primary tool of communication we use everyday and in everything we do. Yet, the field of child welfare, and social work in general, has not paid much attention to the use of words and language as a tool to initiate change. Many writers and pioneers of social work and mental health literature seem to have assumed that if a practitioner has the right attitude, values, and beliefs about the dignity of the client, for example, somehow he or she will say the right things at the right time in order to achieve the intended outcome. The following are some useful techniques and use of language borrowed from the writings of Solution-focused brief therapy literature (Berg, 1994; Berg & Reuss, 1997; Berg & Kelly, 2000; DeJong & Berg, 2002) about what to say and how to say in such a way that would translate respectful attitudes, values, and beliefs into words.

We cannot stress enough the importance of language in the work we do. Interviewing clients involves an exchange of information. Even while we are asking questions, we give information while we gather it, all at the same time.

For example, notice the attitude conveyed when a worker asks a client the following simple question:

“Have you had a job before?”

From the client’s perspective contrast this same question phrased slightly differently:

“How many jobs have you had before?”

The implied message in the second question is that “you must have had many jobs before and I am curious about how many you had,” while the first question can easily imply, “You do not seem like a person who had a job before.”

Notice another more dramatic difference between the following two sentences that your workers might ask a client during an interview:

“What would your child say she hates the most about your being drunk?”

Contrasted with

“What would your child say she likes the best about your being sober, even for one day?”

One can easily imagine two entirely different responses to these two differently phrased questions. The most common response to the first question is to become defensive first, then often followed by attacking or criticizing the agency, the worker, or most frequently the child who is an innocent bystander to this conversation. In contrast, the second question is likely to help the mother to remember all the positive things she does with her child while she is sober. This positive memory might even act to trigger the mother to remember what to do more of.

The same goes with the worker - supervisor interactions. **For example**, a supervisor addressing the worker’s inability to complete paperwork on time might phrase the comments in the following different ways:

“What do you have to do to get your paperwork done on time again this week?”

or

“I wonder how you managed to get your paperwork done on time three months ago?”

The first question above comes across as nagging, cajoling, and demanding, depending on the tone of voice, while the second questions highlights the worker’s success three months ago, implying that the worker can do it again. While the first question could easily cause a defensive response, thus leaving both parties with a bad taste, the second makes the worker realize that the supervisor was paying attention to his or her successful completion of the paperwork. It is likely to foster a positive interaction and even possibly an enhanced motivation to repeat the success.

It is important to become aware of which aspect of the worker’s competence you want to emphasize and which new skills the worker needs to acquire. Looking at a new necessary skill the worker must acquire as an addition to what the worker already knows is a much more positive and encouraging way to approach the teaching than viewing it as a very difficult, monumental task. The parallel is for the worker to view the parents learning new skills as an “add-on,” instead of teaching a brand new skill, which can be an overwhelming task for the worker as well as for the parent.

Using linguistic techniques, listed below, will foster taking on a collaborative, “not-knowing” posture for the supervisor.

“Silence is golden”: Silence in conversation is often misunderstood and misused because most people assume that silence means there is no interaction. Quite the contrary. A good conversation strategy includes effective use of silence. In order to do this, one needs to be comfortable with silence, at times, for as long as 5 - 7 seconds. This length of silence can be excruciatingly painful for many people, though there is a great deal of difference between cultures. Most conversations involve taking turns talking, and when the other person (worker) is silent in response to your question, it means it is still the other person’s turn to talk. As a supervisor, you need to master the effective use of silence and train yourself to be comfortable with silence in order to generate the worker’s solutions. Many people use conversation as a tool to “think out loud” and the supervisor frequently serves the role of “sounding board” for the worker and to validate that the worker’s plan of action is valid and on track. This is an important aspect of the supervisor’s teaching and mentoring role.

“You must have good reasons to . . . ”: Here is the first big test to try your “not-knowing” posture in action. **For example,** many supervisors easily become frustrated with workers who show a habitual pattern of tardiness in such routine areas as coming to work, meeting paperwork deadlines, or any other tasks or issues that have been discussed already with the worker with no positive result. When it happens one more time, the first impulse is to blast the worker out of the water because you are frustrated. We know that will not solve the problem, nor change the situation. You cannot change his/her behavior; only the worker can change

his/her own behavior. When faced with this kind of situation, a very good way to begin the conversation is to say (with a calm, soft, concerned tone of voice),

“Mary, we have discussed your inability to meet the deadline many times before and I know you are an intelligent person and you are trying very hard to correct this situation, and yet it continues. So, it occurs to me that perhaps I may not have looked at this problem from your perspective and it is very likely that you must have a very good reason to . . . (pause) not be able to meet the deadline again with your paperwork. Perhaps I have been insensitive to your circumstances. Can you tell me what are some good reasons you have for this difficulty? I wonder if there is something I can do to be helpful?”

It is important for you to be ready to hear the worker’s explanation (often called excuses). Sit back, stay calm, and wait for an answer, even though it might take a while for the worker to gather his/her thoughts. You need to be comfortable with silence. If the worker cannot come up with a “good reason,” then you might suggest that you end the conversation with an understanding that you will get together again soon and in the meantime the worker can give some thought to this. If the worker has an alternative idea of how to solve the problem, then you can proceed with discussion for the purpose of finding a solution, not to make the worker feel guilty or responsible for the problem. You want the worker to be responsible for solutions. It is important not to be sarcastic or cynical, but to speak with genuine curiosity and sincerity and to listen to the solution offered.

Many workers have successfully used this phrase when their clients have failed to follow through on their agreed-upon actions, such as failure to take the child to school or to get much needed medical care for the child. The goal is to come up with an alternative to unproductive behavior that creates problems for themselves and others, not to blame, analyze what might be the character flaw.

Tentative language (hedging): Also described as collaborative language and language of negotiation. Getting in the habit of using tentative language helps to facilitate collaboration and negotiation. So, what is tentative language? Phrases such as, “It seems like . . .,” “Could it be . . .?” “It sounds like . . .,” “Perhaps . . .,” “I am not sure . . .,” or “I wonder,,,,,” and many other questions that are put forth with a tentative tone of voice facilitates collaboration. When you begin the conversation in a tentative posture, you are issuing an invitation to the worker to express his or her opinions and ideas. This way also works well with anyone you want to negotiate with and to arrive at solutions that both parties agree on.

Compare these beginning sentences with a more definitive beginning of a sentence such as, “It will never work,” or “It is not an option,” “We can never go for it,” “Don’t even go there!” Sentences that end with an exclamation mark indicate to the listener that you are closing the door for any possibility of negotiation. **For example**, we see this often when we observe parents of teenagers take a hard line with such definitive words, perhaps out of frustration from having been through this many times. You can observe the teenager usually roll their eyes to the ceiling and walk away, feeling quite hopeless about any possibility of influencing or

swaying the decision that is made without their input. Frequently they feel disfranchised and discounted. Then they become angry, and tend to act out behaviorally rather than negotiate with parents. Many workers express the same hopeless, “Why bother” attitude when faced with similar situation with their supervisors, clients, or co-workers.

Tentative language is particularly useful when you want to influence and teach workers without their clearly expressed wish or desire to learn certain things from you. It makes it possible for you to open the door for discussion without sounding like you are preaching or lecturing. Get comfortable using tentative language fluently; you will notice how much easier it is to risk proposing an off-the-wall idea to others as a beginning of a negotiation.

Suppose . . . (pause): There is a saying that “people perish without a vision.” This simple phrase, “Let’s just suppose . . . for a moment, all your frustrations related to your co-workers are all solved . . . what would you do then that you are not doing right now?” This is the beginning for a supervisor trying to help a worker to imagine what he or she would do differently rather than suffering terribly and spending her time and energy being upset about the other worker. **For example,** a worker walked into a supervisor’s office and vented her frustration at the copy machine not working right. She was overwhelmed by a client who avoided her for days, and she could not finish her paperwork on time. It felt like nothing was going right for days now and she was on the verge of breaking down into tears.

The supervisor, noticing how upset the worker was, calmly asked this question:

Supervisor: I can see Beth that you are really trying to get things done but it is difficult to make things work out today. Come and sit down in my office and take a deep breath. Good, one more deep breath. Now, just suppose . . . all these worked out right somehow. It may sound strange, but somehow it worked out like magic, that all this is behind you right now. What would you be doing then that you are not doing right now?"

The worker was caught off-guard, hesitated for a moment, then followed the supervisor into her office, sat down in a chair, and took a deep breath.

Worker: "Well, first of all, I would be calmer, I would just concentrate on what I need to do next to get the work done."

Supervisor: OK, so when you are calmer, what will be the first task you will tackle?

Worker: I want to make sure that I try to contact the client one more time. If I still cannot find her, then I will move on to making notes on her file and will try to locate other people, perhaps get to the school and talk to the children first. Maybe the school can tell me how to contact the mother.

Supervisor: Sounds like a wonderful idea.

Using this "suppose" questions allows the worker to imagine themselves doing something more constructive, instead of seeing only what gets in her way and being frustrated. This effective use of worker's creativity and imagination makes it

possible to by-pass the frustrating situation and get beyond the troubles to arrive at steps toward solutions. Imagine what this worker can teach some parent to do the same with own frustrating situations.

Skills for Goal Negotiation

Everything we do on the job do is goal-driven. Keeping this in mind by periodically reviewing and reminding yourself about the purpose for getting up in the morning helps you (and workers) to focus and to decide what is important and what is not. People become petty and irritable when they lose sight of what all the hard work is about. When you disagree or when you mediate conflicts between two workers, for example, you need to begin with some ideas of a likely outcome that you can live with, at minimum. Surprisingly, all goals can be negotiated, through a give-and-take approach: What comes first, and how we will know we are meeting the goal. The goal must be described in behavioral and measurable terms so that the client and/or worker know when they have achieved their goal. For the purpose of our work, good goals have the following characteristics:

- Good goals are described in positive terms, that is, presence of solutions, rather than an absence of problems. For example, instead of saying to the worker to reduce the absenteeism, state the goal as “coming to work everyday.” Always state what the worker needs to do, rather than what

she needs to stop doing. This indicates a clear task the worker needs to do without making judgment about what the worker is not doing.

- Goals are described in a behavioral, measurable way so that when the goal is achieved, both the worker and the supervisor know they are taking steps toward the desirable outcome. What is going on inside needs some outward sign that something positive is happening. This enhances motivation to keep trying and inspires hope that life can be a little bit better yet.
- Goals must be important or meaningful to the worker and yourself. Unless it is important to the worker, the will or desire to negotiate is absent, and the worker will likely go through the motion of cooperating but slow to implement. Therefore, you need to first make sure that changes you are asking the worker to make are important and meaningful to the worker as well as it is to you.
- Goals must be small, do-able, and realistic. Do not shoot for something that is unrealistic or that you have no idea if it is possible for the worker to do. Make sure the worker knows how to do what you are asking him or her to do.
- Goals are described as a beginning of the solution, not the end of change.
- Imagine yourself facing the problem together with the worker because when the worker does better, you also do better as a supervisor. Do not

face the person, but imagine yourself standing next to the worker and you are facing the problem together in order to arrive at the solution.

We find that once we know where we are headed, it is much easier to know what the necessary steps are. Therefore, by being clear about the outcome you are looking for, you have already accomplished more than 50% of the task at hand.

Skills for Exception Exploration

All problems have exceptions. This refers to situations in which one would normally expect the problem to occur in their usual situations, but somehow the problem either did not occur, or even if it occurred, was not as serious or severe as usual. What seems like an accidental event, upon close examination shows that somehow someone did something differently so that the slight change happened. **For example**, even a chronic mentally ill person who has been hearing voices inside her head, when asked carefully indicates that she does not hear voices when she is talking to the worker or other people who care about her. Even the most chronic alcohol and drug users, when asked about it out of curiosity, can remember times when they did not use substance, sometimes for hours or days. Even the most abusive parent or violent youth, have lots of times when they are calm, thoughtful, polite, and helpful to others. Capitalizing on these significant but unrecognized

successes, however small, indicate to the client that he or she can be a thoughtful and a loving parent.

Since 90% - 93% (it varies from state to state, county to county) of CPS investigation does not involve "removal" of children, it means there is just enough (at times, barely enough) safety in the home to build on. This "barely enough" is an exception to the problem of chronic neglect or a chronic state of disarray in the home. The exception maybe very small, compared to the monumental size and seriousness of the problems clients are facing. However, all solutions begin somewhere, usually in small steps.

Recognizing this exception to the problems is the first step to increasing such exceptions. As they often say, it truly is a "one step at a time" process. The first step to capitalize on this small, seemingly insignificant level of "exceptions to problems" could be when the mother could have drank but somehow she managed not to do so. When the worker sees this smallest possible success to build on and points this out to the mother, the worker becomes a little more hopeful about the mother. When the mother sees this small piece of success, her own sense of potential to be a caring parent for her child increases. There is no more powerful motivator than having hope about oneself.

All problems have exceptions, including addictions, violence, abuse, depression and a host of other problems. Because workers are not trained to look for exceptions, they miss a great many opportunities to enhance client motivation, to build a positive working relationship with clients, and even to see the successes in themselves. Therefore, it is imperative that supervisors get in the habit of not only

seeing the exceptions to problems but also pointing them out to workers, so that they can apply this with their clients. Parents can, in turn, be taught to look for exceptions in their difficult child. Whenever a worker hears a parent (or foster parent) complain about the child, the worker can calmly and quietly ask the parent, "So tell me about the time when she could have stole but somehow she managed not to?" This kind of question draws the parent's attention to the child's successes, rather than keeping the focus on the problem. Being able to see both sides of the child's problem not only puts things in better perspective, and also gives the parent more hope about the child, and a more balanced and accurate picture.

The decision to close a case means there is just enough safety existing in the family, that the parent is doing something positive and good for the child from time to time. Pointing this out to the parent, along with lots of positive feedback is a powerful way to let the parent know that the parent must have done something positive for the child. Many clients are surprised to discover that their parenting effort is paying off after all. This helps the worker to recognize that he/she is planting a seed that may grow into a beautiful flower someday. Preventive work is like planting flower seeds on the roadside: We never know which seeds will take hold, germinate, and eventually bloom into beautiful flowers someday, but we know that some will.

The same principle about exceptions applies to working with foster care services, especially working with children in foster placement. As we have seen in the discussion section on assumptions we hold about children, we know that all children want to know that adults around them are proud of them, they are learning

something new and want to please important adults in their lives. Knowing this, paying attention to the exceptions the children are able to create for themselves, is a valuable way for the child to know that there are something good in them and some adult in his/her environment recognizes this. Workers can encourage foster parents to keep track of exceptions the child shows and to remind the child about their successes.

Parents of adolescents tend to focus on what the adolescent is not doing well, rather than to the exceptions to this picture of the teenager. **For example**, when a worker makes comments about an adolescents' ability to "walk away" from potentially explosive situations, this attracts the attention of the adolescent. This ability to "catch them being good," sounds simple, but it takes a considerable degree of self-discipline and training. It is shining a spotlight on small but significant successes.

Supervisor feedback: Power of compliments and acknowledgement

The majority of child welfare workers came into the field wanting to make a difference for children and their families (Berg & Kelly, 2000). One of the supervisor's tasks is to equip workers with skills and means to express this desire to make a difference by setting a positive tone for the team and the profession. All of us want to belong to a group of people we want to associate with, identify with, and who we aspire to be like. A sense of group cohesion and positive identification with members of a group comes from knowing that one belongs to a group of winners, not losers. The best way to build team spirit and increase a positive working atmosphere is the liberal use of compliments and of giving credit to workers, both in the presence of other workers and in private. Many good leaders tout the image

of the group identity as unique, prestigious, and more advanced than any other group. Some even boast as bigger and better than any other group! Not only do these reminders reinforce the sense of belonging to a prestigious group but also they boost morale and enhance the workers' desire to do better.

For example: A medium-sized county child protective service team decided to institute a "case conference" where workers could bring their frustrating and hopeless cases in order to get some help from their peers under the direction of the unit supervisor and a consultant. There were three other CPS units in the same county but this one team was the first to institute this format. The supervisor presented this idea as an experimental step. They would evaluate it's usefulness to workers and could disband after a number of meetings. The rationale for this new forum was to pull together their practice wisdom and experience, as well as to support and help each other. There were several workers who had been on the job for more than ten years, as well as new hires. Some simple rules of conduct were set up: Each member of the team was to offer suggestions only, not to criticize other's work; should wait for their turn to speak without cutting others off; and must respect the privacy of the client as well as workers presenting cases. The team was encouraged to discuss their successful experiences since the last meeting and what they learned from this success. The morale of this unit soared and every worker felt supported by their co-workers and the supervisor.

The unit members were so proud of their "case conference" that other workers in other units wanted to join in. With their supervisor's approval, some

attended the meeting voluntarily. Soon, other units decided to follow suit and workers began comparing their “case conference” with others. A mild sense of competition enhanced humor as well as morale in the department.

A highly respected child protection services supervisor, Patrick Fitzgibbon in Saginaw, Michigan, always points out what the worker did well and then suggests what the worker can “add-on” to what he or she already has done. **For example**, if a worker’s written report is bad, he never says to the worker that it is bad or what is missing in the report, but always points out what information in the report is already useful, then adds what might improve the report a little bit better. This way of conceptualizing the supervisory task as an “add-on” to what is already present, rather than overhauling or filling an empty container with knowledge or skill, makes the supervisor’s task less overwhelming. Patrick Fitzgibbon relates that he has agreed to supervise workers that other supervisors dismissed as “hopeless,” and these same workers turned out to be very dedicated, committed, and passionate about their jobs. Of course he is very proud that he played a part in nurturing them by seeing the potential for growth and not just half-empty glass.

Scaling Questions

As the workers are learning to collaborate with their clients, they are asking clients to participate in assessment of their situation, including the safety of their children and a range of other issues. Scaling questions indicate to workers and clients alike that problems and solutions are not an either/or proposition but are on a continuum. That is, everything in life is not black and white - there are many shades of gray. A worker can ask a client to scale their confidence, hopefulness, determination to have the children returned to become a family unit, keep the children together, stay out of jail, stay in school until graduation, determined to stop

doing drugs and drinking, and so on. Scaling questions can also be used to motivate a client to “hang in there,” since he or she has already made it all the way up to 4 or 5 on a scale of 1 to 10. It is amazing how surprised clients are when they realize that they already have done a great deal of work to get up to 4.

Scaling questions are very useful in working with clients who are not able to articulate their thoughts and ideas in words, for example, children who do not have language skills to express themselves clearly. Some adults do better discussing things in a very concrete manner and do not do well discussing abstract notions such as hope, ambition, determination, confidence, etc. Scaling questions are very useful for people with a limited ability to express themselves verbally.

When interviewing young children, many items can be used to visually represent the 1 to 10 scales. Things can be made much more concrete for children by using pictures. An up and down line, a rope on the floor, even a balloon can be used to assess things such as the lowest and highest sense of safety, sense of attachment to their parent, fear of being punished, like and dislike. There must be a clear indication of what 1 stands for and what 10 stands for, thus giving a clear sense of how the child’s life can move up and down. It is better to indicate 10 usually stands for the best situation that a child can hope to have, and 1 indicates the lowest and toughest situation the child has experienced. One CPS worker uses such things as a pen, indicating one end of the pen as a 1 and the opposite end 10, the worker asks, “How safe do you feel about going home today when school is over?” You can also ask the child’s sense of attachment to his or her caretakers with scaling questions, by saying, “10 stands for you love your mommy with all your

heart, and 1 stands for you do not want to live with her, where do you think you are at between 1 and 10?" for more detailed use of scaling questions adapted to working with children, see Berg & Steiner (2002).

Many adolescents respond well to scaling questions since it is easy to conceptualize the answers. Sometimes they respond in numbers to describe a range of issues. One young man on probation described a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 stood for things were going well for him, and 1 stood for the most terrible shape he has been in.

Adolescent:: "I would say with my friends, I am 8 or 9. I get along pretty well with my friends and they are all pretty cool guys. We do OK as long as we hang out together and not get into trouble. With my parents, about 3 or 4 - well, it's OK as long as we stay out of each other's ways. They get on my nerves when my mom goes after me with her high-pitched voice but then I try to stay out of her way most of the time. With school, I try to be cool about it but I am worried about my grades, you know, I have to buckle down but it is hard to do when there are fights and stuff. I would put my school work at 4 or 5 because I am behind other kids and I don't like it."

Worker: "What would your probation officer say she thinks you are on a scale of 1 to 10 where 10 means she thinks you are doing well and 1 means she doesn't think you are going to make it? Where would she say you are at?"

Adolescent: "I would say she thinks I am at about a 4."

Worker: “What would she say you need to do to get up to a 5?”

Adolescent: “She would say I need to stay in school, not miss any classes, bring up my grades, and stay away from drugs and not skip school.”

Worker: “What would your best friend say where he thinks you are at on the same scale?”

The flexibility of this scaling question means this can be a very useful tool for the supervisor-worker dialogues as well as the worker-client interviews. The examples of dialogues between supervisor and worker will follow in the next section.

Relationship Questions:

- What do you suppose your coworkers in this unit would say is your most important contribution to the team spirit?
- What would Mrs. Wright (client) say you did during your home call that was most helpful to her and her children?
- What would little Ben say you did (I realize that he is still very young and you can imagine he can describe things to you with words), during

your interview with him that made it so easy to talk to you about such difficult topics as sexual abuse?

- (to a client) What did the judge (or probation officer) say you need to do so that you will be able to get your children back to live with you again?
- (to a worker) What would your children say they like the best about visiting with you?
- (to a mother) What would your children say they like the least about living with you Tom (mother's boy friend)?
- (To a mother) On a scale of 1 o 10, where 10 stands for life was going pretty good, and 1 stands for life is terrible, what would your children say their life was at before Tom (mother's boyfriend) came in to live with you? What would they say where they are at since he moved in six months ago?

When you listen carefully to these questions, it becomes clear that all questions are phrased to solicit not the worker's or client's own perception of their situations. Instead the questions are phrased to help the listener to step outside of him/herself and observe themselves from the perspective of others - their co-worker's, client's, or even children. These reflective questions are called relationship questions. Why is this necessary? How is this useful for the child welfare field?

In working with both clients and workers, the ability to collaborate means listening to the perceptions, ideas, and wishes of others while at the same time

giving out information and challenging their ideas. One of the most important aspects of child welfare is working with parents to help them become aware of their child's needs for safety, stability, and nurturing on a consistent basis. Relationship questions alert the listener's views toward the need of the child. They nudge the parents toward looking at the world from the child's perspective (empathy) as well as to assess the child's needs for safety and nurture from the child's point of view, thus enhancing the parent-child relationship. Relationship questions are also a wonderful tool for indirectly teaching parents about the child's unique needs, as well as teaching them that a child has their own preferences, special needs, and unique traits and characteristics that are different from the parent.

The same principle applies to supervising workers. We want the workers to increase their skills in listening to clients, thus learning to engage clients quickly and efficiently. Here are more examples of relationship questions that alert the parent workers to pay attention to their child clients.

- What do you suppose your children would say about how safe they feel living here with you?
- What would your son say is the best part of visiting his dad on weekends? The worst part?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 stands for your children feel very safe living here and 1 is the opposite, what number between 1 and 10 would they tell me?

- What about living with their grandparents (dad, uncle, foster parent, etc), how safe would they say they feel, on the same scale?
- What would they say you could do to increase their feeling of security?
- What would your best friend say that you are like when you are a good parent to your children?
- What would Mrs. Evans say you've done so far that is most helpful to her and her children? On a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the most helpful, and 1 is the opposite, where would he place this visit with you?
- What would she say has to change in her relationship with her boyfriend to tell her that it is safe enough to have him move back in the house?
What about the children?
- What would your client say would increase the rating 1 point higher?
- What would your co-workers on the team say is your most important contribution to the team spirit since you've joined our team?
- What would your co-workers say they would like you to keep doing because they find it helpful? Anything else?
- What would the school social worker say you do that is most helpful in working with you?
- How confident is Mrs. Mitchell that her husband will really stay drug-free this time so that he could be more responsible toward the children?
What confident are you about him? What tells you this?

There are numerous other applications of relationship questions that widen workers' perspectives of their relationships with clients, co-workers, and community agencies and other resources.

Challenging workers while being supportive:

We have conducted many supervisors' focus groups and listened to their philosophy of being "supportive" of their workers. We have also observed their work in real life situations (Berg & Kelly, 2000) over a number of years and in many different counties from very large urban to small, rural areas. On numerous occasions, discussion invariably turned to the importance of supervisor support of workers. We, of course, applauded their good skills and listened to their reasoning in how they arrived at this important point. Then we observed them in action. We were frankly very surprised to learn what they really meant by "being supportive" of their workers. We also learned that one supervisor's definition of "supportive" behavior was quite different from another's. For some supervisors, "being supportive" means unconditional acceptance of whatever the worker has done or is doing without challenging the worker's ideas or behaviors.

Tom, who has served close to 20 years in various areas of child welfare services, saw himself as a champion of child protection against neglectful parents, particularly those parents who got involved with criminal activities and/or had a history of drug use. He indeed had a soft spot for children and went out of his way to rescue the children from their inadequate parents. Tom would gladly put in long hours, go to court willingly and had very good relationships with law enforcement officers, judges, assistant district attorneys, and guardian ad litem. He knew the laws and codes like the back of his hand, and could cite section and ordinance numbers and wording. Yet his use of language around the office among the staff was crude, vulgar, and often included many "f__ words."

His supervisor, recently promoted from the rank of line worker after many years of service, saw herself as a “supportive” supervisor, even though she disagreed with this worker’s single-minded view of protecting children and of “removal” as the answer to almost all situations. The supervisor repeated her cardinal rule of “supporting” the workers because her own supervisor was the opposite of what she wanted to be. The supervisor would get into a great deal of difficulty with this outspoken worker even though agency policy and her own philosophy of child welfare clashed head-on with his approach. The supervisor did not know how to gently challenge his view of removal as the solution to practically all cases. She would often complain to other workers about Tom. Every worker in the team knew Tom’s problem and they began to step in and chide Tom about his tendency to have “only a hammer, therefore every problem “looked like a nail.”

Recognizing her own difficulty with challenging workers, this supervisor instituted a biweekly case conference attended by the entire unit to which difficult or stuck cases were brought. The other workers in the unit often challenged Tom’s ideas and offered suggestions for looking into different aspects of the family. At times they offered their own solution to similar situations, along with many different options to look into. The supervisor, recognizing her lack of skills for challenging Tom in a gentle and constructive manner, utilized team building as a good way to enforce more individualized approach to child welfare.

I am sure you can think of different ways to manage Tom’s single lens approach to assessing many different family situations. Being “supportive” of workers come in different shape and forms. It is a good idea to take an inventory of

specific behaviors that you do to be “supportive.” It is also very important for you to ask workers for a specific set of behaviors from you when they ask for your “support.” Then you will be able to do the very things that the worker considers supportive. One person’s definition of ‘supportive’ can be very different from another’s.

Worker Empowerment

Since most of the direct contact is done in-home or in the field on their own with limited opportunity for new workers to observe other skilled workers conduct interviews, most supervisors must rely on the worker's report to make decisions that affect the course of life for a child or a family. Indeed it is a serious business, and workers and supervisors have profound power and influence to shape the course of action. Supervisors must make life altering decisions solely based on a worker's report, their observations, what they heard, how they interacted with the client, how they phrased the questions to obtain certain information from the client, and how they interpret their observations into coherent data. It is indeed a sobering thought.

Balancing this with the need to truly support and empower workers takes considerable skill. The best way to do this is through asking questions, just as the worker must make decisions about the clients while empowering them to be competent parents for their children. Though being supportive and empowering seems like a daunting task. Here are some useful pointers to make the task more manageable and do-able.

Details, details, and more details: Whenever you hear workers describe clients as "unmotivated," "resistive," "defensive," "does not own up to the problem," "she just did not care," "she is scared of her mother," and many such descriptive words, make sure you ask for details - what came before and after the worker's interaction with the client that resulted in such conclusions being made. The word, "empowerment" sounds like something big and powerful that one does,

but it could be as simple as the worker feeling he or she is in control of the interview. For a profession that aim to be helpful to the client, meeting clients who is not interested in the help we offer can be the most helpless feeling one can face. When our clients make us feel helpless, it is easy to become angry and immediately come to the conclusion that the client is beyond help. Rather than accepting sweeping description of the client worker reports, a curious supervisor can ask in a soft, pleasant, and non-blaming tone, “I wonder what did she did to let you know that she was “unmotivated?” Ask for behavioral description of what took place in their interaction with their clients. The worker might say, “The mother always promises she will take the child to the doctor’s office but she just won’t do it” with a frustrated voice.

Mentoring workers to manage their interviews with clients means that you offer your practice wisdom. It is not written anywhere in a manual but is a “people skill” you developed over the years through your many years’ of on the job learning. Since we know that lecturing or teaching is not as effective as having the worker formulate his or her own answers in the manner that make sense to him or her, asking questions is the best way to help workers to formulate effective interviewing strategies. **For example**, pay attention to how the supervisor empowers the worker in the following dialogue.

Supervisor: I wonder what did this mother do to let you know that she was unmotivated?

Worker: Well, I told her that she must take the child to the doctor's office because it is obvious that the child is very sick.

Supervisor: Do you suppose the mother decided that the child was not seriously ill and that the boy did not need medical attention?

Worker: I think the mother is so overwhelmed with her life that she did not even think about it.

Supervisor: Oh, I see. How do you suppose this mother heard your suggestion that she take the boy to the doctor's office?

Worker: She just acted like she just couldn't be bothered. She was very depressed, and no energy.

Supervisor: So, knowing what you know about this mother, what would you say is the likelihood of this mother taking the child to the doctor this time?

Worker: Not very likely. The household didn't change all that much since I was there last week, she didn't look any better herself and of course the boy looked sicker.

Supervisor: Knowing what you know about this mother, what would she say she needs so that she can take the child to the doctor?

Worker: She would probably say that she needs transportation, someone to call the doctor's office, and then someone to watch the other kids.

From this brief conversation it is easy to see that the supervisor can help the worker arrive at a much more realistic and do-able solution instead of the worker

feeling helpless to influence the client do what the mother needs to do. Spending a few minutes with the worker can have a long lasting influence when teaching solution-building skills. It can all begin with the supervisor directing the conversation from the worker's perspective. It models for workers the same approach to use with the parent around her inability to identify with her children's needs.

Ask the worker to explain the details, especially when you notice the worker writing off clients or situations as hopeless or unchangeable. From this example, it is also clear that using big words such as "unmotivated," or "resistant" is not very useful, even though it might make the worker feel good for a short while. Get in the habit of breaking things down to small details so the worker gets the idea of looking for small details that will make it possible for positive change. A worker's shift in thinking usually comes from looking at small details of a client's life.

Strategies for Managing “Difficult People”

Various focus groups of child welfare supervisors indicate that many feel stuck when it comes to the topic of “difficult” workers. We want to caution you not to think of difficult workers as a fixed state of personality disorders, due to psychopathology of certain workers. If you think this way, the solution to this problem logically flows to changing the person with these personality or character flaws. As most of us know, changing someone who does not want to be changed is an impossible task. We can only alter our reactions and responses to these difficult encounters. We can look at these “difficulties” in an entirely new light, so that different responses are more likely to emerge. When we put a different meaning to the same behavior, we open up the option of responding differently to the same person or situation.

It is the reality of a life in the work place that these “difficult” workers are here to stay and are not likely to go away, no matter how much we wish. Though not entirely satisfactory, a better way is to see such situations as a mismatch of personalities and styles. There are many self-help books that deal with this topic.

However, frequently one man's "difficult" case may not be so to another, just as what was "difficult" cases at one time in your career may no longer be so when the situation changes. If you are having trouble with "difficult" workers, please read on. We want to offer a two-step process to make your life a little bit easier. The first step is prevention and the second is "doing something different."

Prevention: Prevention strategies begin with the "a stitch in time" concept. This is never easy to do, especially if you inherit staff when you are assigned or agree to be a supervisor. Here are some tips:

1. **Setting a positive tone** for the team or the unit is not easy but can be done. As a supervisor, you have a lot more influence in setting the tone for the unit than you might imagine. These are the small things you do: Being considerate of workers, being friendly, using a gentle and soft voice, being polite even when you are upset, and the usual rules of social and office etiquette.
2. **Having a sense of humor** is important in the workplace as anywhere else in life. Do not take yourself so seriously. Laugh at your own mistakes, shortcomings, and other not-so-perfect traits about yourself. This demonstrates that you are on the same level as your workers, makes you more human and, easier for others to relate to you.
3. **Become a positive rumor monger.** When you hear one person making positive comments, either direct or implied, about another

person in the team, make sure that the second person gets to hear about it. This is especially helpful when these two do not seem to like each other all that much. Make sure to remind contributions of each workers as the occasion arises at staff meetings.

4. **“Saving face”** means always making sure that you do not insult or put down the other person, whether in private or public. One must be sensitive not to offend the person in public and specially in front of their peers. Use a gentle approach. Using lots of tentative language and hedging, offer a positive spin on shortcomings or mistakes. Make sure to put yourself in their shoes and how you might want to be treated with their shortcomings.
5. **The value of being “confused.”** Ask the other person to clarify things because you are confused. Put the difficulty of the other person on yourself, perhaps because you are “a bit slow to grasp the situation” or you are “not familiar with this difficult and complex situation.” Remember to take a “not-knowing” posture (discussed earlier). It tends to bring out the best in people most of the time, although it does not always work.
6. **Give credit** to the worker, especially those “difficult” people. Make sure you do it in front of other workers, such as at a staff meeting or case conference.

7. **Look for exceptions** to the identified problems. Comment on the exception in private and in a light, casual tone, instead of making a big fuss about it in front of others. If done in the wrong tone of voice, this can easily backfire on you. **For example**, if the worker habitually comes to work late, look for times when he or she comes to work on time. Make sure you casually happen to pass the worker and mumble under your breath what a positive impact it had on the unit or on you.
8. **Be pro-active.** Rather than waiting for complaints or problem to develop, become the initiator. **For example**, if you are newly promoted from the rank of worker to supervisor and end up supervising your former co-workers, make the first move. Ask your unit to meet with you. Explain the obvious, and ask for their help and cooperation for the welfare of children and their families in need. Flaunt the fact that this is your first supervisory experience and you are bound to make mistakes. Ask for their help and patience while you are learning the ropes. We all are tempted to hide our shortcomings; instead state the obvious and have a sense of humor about yourself.
9. **Be open and honest.** A colleague of mine recently became the director of a large division with no experience in child welfare or even in social service. She was recruited from a related field in the

private sector. The first thing she did was to gather the immediate staff who would be working under her. She described her work experience, where she grew up, her family background, her immediately family including her husband and her children, what kind of life experience she had, and what her vision for the department was. She explained herself as an ordinary person who was struggling. Immediately the reputation of her as an “average working mother” spread across the offices.

10. **Use Common Sense.** Occasionally we hear about a famous case of lack of common sense. **For example**, you may remember the big fuss and lots of jokes a school principal created when he suspended a little boy in kindergarten with accusation of sexual assault, because the boy kissed another girl in class. When you follow the rules to the letter, this type of incidence can happen.

Another Example: A 10-year old foster child wanted to have a sleepover at her friend’s house. The worker at first wanted to put a stop to this because of unclear rules about liability. She spent hours clarifying rules regarding such requests. There was even a talk of doing a background check of the friends’ parents. Sometimes the circumstances, the relationship, and the child’s ability to use common sense supercedes rules and regulations. It is a balance of individual needs, within the context of what went on before and what is doing on

presently, and then one needs to make a common sense judgment.

Good question to ask yourself is: What would the man on the street say about this situation? As a supervisor familiar with the child, the foster family, and the worker involved in the case, you may need to weigh the benefit and risks involved. If you are not confident, you can always bring this up to your team at case conference as a teaching case as well as getting some input to your decision. Having multiple perspectives on the same situation helps you to decide what course of action to take, in addition to your common sense judgment.

11. **Elicit solution from the unit or team.** When managing a team or unit of workers, your responsibility is dual: that is, paying attention to well-being of the unit as well as individual worker. There are many situations where “fairness” issue is involved, it is best to use the collective minds of the unit to solve problems. **For example**, when a worker has excessive absences from work, how it will affect the unit as a whole should be uppermost in your mind. Rather than trying to answer questions like, “How come she gets away with this?,” it might be more productive to ask the worker to address to his/her colleagues directly during the staff meeting, thus making it a team issue, instead of making it your personal cross. You might discuss the issue with the involved worker and explain the impact her excessive absences have on the team and ask her to explain to the team herself on what she is

doing to correct the situation. The burden of keeping the confidentiality of workers will be handled by the worker, rather than making your burden.

12. Set personal and professional boundary in supervision. Supervision is not a therapy or counseling and the two should not mix. It is difficult to be in this field of “helping” professionals and seem to be indifferent to workers who are having difficulty with personal issues. This is particularly so when some workers confide in you about their terrible family history – an alcoholic family background, “dysfunctional” family, going through a divorce, was physically abused by a partner, lots of health and psychiatric problems in their family members or with themselves, and myriad of other issues that interfere with their functioning. Many supervisors who want to be “supportive” and “compassionate” to their workers often have a great deal of difficulty establishing the boundary between personal concerns and professional responsibility. Do not get in the habit of excusing excessive absences or tardiness of a worker for various personal reasons. Spending an excessive amount of time with one particular worker on an ongoing basis is also deadly for team morale. Your obligation is to manage the unit. Many workers lose respect for a supervisor who is perceived as showing favoritism. Consult with the union steward or human resources department to find out what the civil service law and employment contract says about personal and professional boundaries.

13. Be a change manager. Change is inevitable. It is a fact of life that we never stand still. Yet, the myth and yearning for “stability” continues in our culture. Life is full of adjustments and we are constantly making choices. Make this your mantra. Be a change manager so that you celebrate change, not dread it. **For example**, rather than dreading the change over to a new computer system, one county decided to capitalize on it. The office was decorated with balloons, they played music and told lots of jokes. Supervisors and managers wore wizard hats and clown make-up. They designated a cheerleader and brought in pizzas for the staff during the most stressful time.

Do Something Different:

The following short poem was sent by a friend in South Africa. Unfortunately I do not have the source. I hope you find the message in this piece amusing and useful.

An autobiography in five short chapters

Chapter 1

I walk down the street
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
I fall in.
I am lost . . . I am helpless
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
I pretend I don't see it
I fall in again
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But it still isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am
It is my responsibility
I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street
There is a deep hole in the pavement.
I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down another street.

In this section, we describe some innovative ways to deal with people and situations that make us feel victimized and helpless. Many supervisors describe their job as being squeezed from two sides: top down and bottom up. Their job is to manage both top and bottom. Since we know that we cannot change other people no matter what the nature of the relationship, the burden of changing the difficult

situation is on you. Following are two examples of how to deal with difficult superiors.

Example #1: A colleague of mine, Bruce, was really frustrated with his boss, who was the clinical director of a community mental health center. Every time we get together socially, Bruce would vent his frustration about his boss and describe all the dumb things his boss did. It seemed that Bruce's boss was the most insensitive person one could work for because he would rant and rave, scream at the staff, and berate them so that the staff wanted to avoid him at any cost. It made Bruce's job more difficult because he felt that he had to protect his staff from these unpredictable outbursts. When he met with other community agency representatives, Bruce was very embarrassed by his boss's lack of tact, his brisk and aggressive manner, and the outrageous things he would blurt out at meetings. One evening after dinner Bruce and I brainstormed. We looked at various options, including his quitting the job.

I forgot about this conversation, but some months later I got an email from Bruce explaining the most surprising change of all. Bruce reported that he decided he needed to do something entirely different and could not think of any bright ideas. The next time his boss ranted at him, instead of seething inside with anger and frustration, Bruce jotted down a note at the top right hand corner of his notebook. He kept looking at the, note which simply said, "listen". He kept looking at the word while his boss went on and on. He

nearly fell over when his boss, at the end of his usual ranting, said in a rather sheepish voice, "Bruce, by the way, thanks for listening." The boss was fired by the board of directors after yet another tirade during a meeting soon after this episode, and now Bruce has his old boss's job.

Example #2: A colleague of mine, Dr. Anne Lutz, was doing her post-doctoral work in child psychiatry in a very prestigious hospital on the east coast few years ago. She was very surprised to find how rigidly authoritarian and hierarchical this hospital was, even by usual medical training standards. She disagreed with the approach to patient care many of her supervising experts, believing they were too rigid in the manner they talked to their patients, interns, and residents. She did not like how the experts never wanted to listen to children and their parents' ideas and wishes for treatment, and their unwillingness to interns and residents' opinions or creative ideas on patient care. Since they had the authority to either pass or fail her if they did not like her, and because she wanted to make sure that patients and their parents were treated with respect and dignity, she decided to take a posture of "doing something different."

In case conferences and hospital rounds, Anne generally kept her opinions to herself but always looked for any off-the-cuff comments, treatment plans or discussion that she agreed with. She picked up on those items and spoke up, but kept quiet about those she knew that her superiors would not listen to. She did the same with her fellow residents, interns and

students. In a rather short time, she was regarded as one of the best post-doctoral residents. She was given a great deal of freedom to do what she wanted to do, in addition to more teaching responsibilities.

One of her duties was to manage the psychiatric ward in the hospital with numerous nurses, interns, and residents, in addition to very sick children and their parents. During the daily ward case conferences, some of the nurses, residents, or students would voice what they wanted to do with ‘difficult’ parents who were neglectful or mistreated their own children. The medical staff believed that these “difficult” parents were responsible for the terrible situation their children were in, and would become annoyed and often were rude to them. The staff’s solution during case conferences to these difficult parents were to “confront” the parents and to lecture them about their unacceptable behaviors or even how they caused the child’s serious emotional problems. Recognizing that such an approach would make the engagement of parents more difficult and would lead to premature withdrawal of children from treatment, Anne instead decided to use a more tactful approach with the staff, she would get them to believe that it was their idea to change the strategies.

Being the person in charge of managing treatment procedures on a daily basis, Anne was responsible for having the entire unit understand how to deal with each patient on the ward. Her style of management was to listen to observations, insight, and ideas for what would do the most good to utilize the times children were in the hospital. Anne would listen to the staff’s

ideas, and make sure to comment on things she agreed with. When someone would voice the plan to “confront” the parent or the child, she would gently ask, “Suppose we do that, knowing what you know about this parent, what is the mother likely to do in response?” She would then solicit the staff’s opinions and eventually all the staff would come to an agreement on what to do, generally in the direction of moving away from confronting the parents to finding something with which to compliment the parents and look for things that parents do that are helpful to their children. The morale of the staff and the success rate of the ward increased dramatically, furthering Anne’s reputation as a good manager and a doctor who was easy to work with. Anne was eventually asked to join the faculty of the hospital because her superiors and supervisors were impressed with her bedside manner as well as management skills.

Ways to influence your Superiors

It is commonly described as “sandwich” to describe how the middle managers are “squeezed” from the top and from the bottom. This is not a very helpful way to look at our important functions. Instead, it is more empowering to look at our role as a position where we have (or can create) opportunities for influence. It is a very good position to be in since our influence can move in two directions: upward toward management, as well as downward to supervisees. You have a great ability

to influence as we have described both in previous section. Following are some general ideas you can use to exert influence in an organization:

Get on with the large picture: You need to understand and agree with the larger goals (mission statement, pilot projects, quality improvement of services, etc.) of the administration. It means you have a sincere motivation to do what is good for children, families, and the organization you work for. You interpret these larger goals to your staff, as well as encourage them to buy into new initiatives and efforts.

Be specific about what you want from your boss: As mentioned previously many supervisors mistake “support” as blindly accepting ideas without a clear sense of goals or what it will take to get there. Rather than asking for “support,” be specific about what you want your boss to do for you. Begin your dialogue with your superiors with, “I would like you to support my request (recommendation, suggestion, etc) to . . . (challenge the union, fire a worker, or take disciplinary step toward a worker, and so on). Be clear in your mind about what it is that you want your boss to do.

Many child welfare supervisors and workers tend to be women. Highly competent and successful women managers are those who kept their cool. Even under enormous pressure, they don't lose their temper or end up reduced to tears when upset. It is very important that we do not reduce management decision to personal terms: feeling criticized, attacked, not valued enough, and so on. When you discuss difficult issues with your boss, be persuasive in a calm, rational, concrete, and behavioral terms. You are much more likely to get what you want.

Be willing to negotiate down to something smaller: You may not always get what you want: vacant staff positions filled, more cell phones, better camera equipment, better office furniture, etc. Negotiation is getting more or less of something you really wanted. Look at negotiation as small progress toward what you want for your staff so that their job will be easier and more efficient.

Volunteer: Be willing to volunteer and go the extra mile, such as giving testimony on behalf of the boss's special projects, offering to talk to special committees, or volunteering to serve on committees to learn about how the organization functions. Knowing how decisions are made, where the informal power is, and learning who wields power in your organization, are all important information that you can use to make your job easier. Do not turn down an opportunity to volunteer on a regional or national level. Learning the political process will add to your ability to apply politics at different levels. It will advance your career to be known to others as someone who is cooperative, pleasant to work with, helpful, thoughtful, and an asset to whatever the committee you want to join in the future.

Guidelines For Managing Difficult Situations with Workers

"Saving face" instead of confrontation: Most of us think about the easiest, simplest approach that will bring quick results since we are always short on time.

Confrontation or the “letting them have it” response might make you feel better temporarily, but does not often get you what you want; if anything, it usually backfires. The other person stiffens their posture and digs in their heels, resulting in an even more difficult situation than before. On the contrary “saving face” stance mean giving the other person a graceful way to back off. This works better than a hard-hitting approach in most situations. We have already discussed a number of examples from real life situations, and it is similar to looking at the difficult situation from a “glass is half-full” point of view which emphasizes what is already there, instead of what is not there, which is often described as “half-empty” perspectives.

Instead of pointing out a worker’s mistake, shortcoming, and failures, a thoughtful supervisor would want to preserve the worker’s dignity and self-esteem by first pointing out what the worker has achieved already and suggest how to fill the empty space in the glass. Patrick Fitzgibbon’s work with his workers is a very good example. He always points out what the worker has found out about the client and then indicates what further information would make the report more comprehensive. The following are points to consider before you begin to sort out how to respond to a difficult situation with a worker. Some of the people management skills described here may apply to working with your upper management as well.

The following are important points to consider before you begin to sort out how you want to respond to a difficult worker. Some of the people management skills described here applies to working with your superiors as well.

Decide the outcome you want:

- What do you want from this “difficult” person? Be concrete, behavioral, specific, and most of all, describe the solutions rather than problems.
- Do you want to be right? Do you want the other person to admit that he or she was wrong? How important is this for the task at hand?
- Do you want to get the job done your way or do you want workers to do it in their own way as long as the work gets done?
- Do you want workers to think it was their own idea to do it in certain way or do you want the worker to do it because it was your idea?

Examine these points to decide what is important to you and what makes sense in the situation.

Subtle approaches:

- In most situations, subtle (mixed with humor) approaches work far better than “in your face” type of confrontation which can be easily dismissed as your “personality defect.” Don’t deal with the difficult issue when you are upset or frustrated with the worker (or your superior) because you are likely to say something out of frustration, which usually is not constructive. Such outbursts get easily dismissed and you are not likely to be taken seriously.

- Make sure to use the collaborative language described earlier, in addition to a soft, calm, gentle voice and words spoken out of curiosity, and safe environment that allows the other person to disagree with you. It helps to learn what the objections are. When there is disagreement, it is better to solicit your worker's idea about how to get the job done. Have your worker describe how he or she imagines events unfolding, in detail. Always give credit to the worker who proposes the idea.
- Make sure to point out the strengths of what the worker has done so far as well as the merit of the argument, no matter how small. Then think of small additions to what the worker has done to build on their successes.
For example: If you want a worker to re-write a report, emphasize what the worker has done right so far, and then make suggestions on what to add to it to improve it even more. Or better yet, make suggestions for what should be in the report and what might be the consequences should the report be audited or show up in court documents.

Specific Difficult Situations with Workers

Here we want to address some specific situations of “difficult workers” that you are likely to come across and offer some general and suggestions. Remember that each person has their own meaning of what work means to them personally: For some, work may be a career, a vocation, a commitment to the field and the passion of a lifetime. For others work may be a means to pay mortgages and allow them to pursue their real interests, such antique collecting, playing guitar, dog breeding, etc.

What to do with unmotivated Worker?

Supervisors, managers, and administrators everywhere find this kind of workers to be the most frustrating and difficult to manage. So, you are not alone. They are the ones who would not lift a finger to help others in a pinch, only show minimum commitment to the profession or job, and perform at the “bare bones” level of the job description.

Many of them feel they are entitled to the job they have and it seems like the paycheck is the only motivation for coming to work. They seem to make extra effort to stay out of the supervisor’s radar screen.

Such workers can be very frustrating to most supervisors, but take hearts. According to some studies, they make up only about 20% of the workforce. Of course, the rub is that they take up much more of your energy and time proportionately!

Solutions:

- Spell out the agency mission, goals, expectations, and other standards loud and clear to the worker in the beginning and repeat them as often as necessary.
- Make sure you engage the worker as a person everyday. Ask about their day, weekend, personal life, and interests. In other words, pay attention to them so that they know that you are noticing them. Moving their cubicles close to your office space helps.
- Make sure to compliment any extra work they do for the unit or for other workers, no matter how small or insignificant. Again, you are recognizing their successes. Nobody can resist compliments.

What to do with “self-righteous” workers?

These workers seem like they have to be right all the time and about everything. They are sticklers for rules, policies, and procedures. It seems like they are preoccupied with memorizing rules and regulations and get easily upset if others, particularly supervisors, “fail” to follow the rules. They do the same with clients, such as “when a client lied” or did “not obeyed the law.” They become indignant at the client for their failure to follow procedures, instead of “getting the work done.”

Solutions:

- Always give credit to the worker for knowing the rules, acknowledging it without debating the point, and then quickly move onto the task at hand.

- Do not confront such workers because they will come up with endless list of possible loopholes to plug and they will continue to dwell on the injustice for a long time.
- Ask the worker's ideas for "correction" and then move onto what might be the immediate step to take if she/he were in your position.
- Negotiate with them on what can be fixed immediately and what cannot be changed. Focus on what "can" be done first.

Worker who perpetually lacks confidence

Often nicknamed "nervous Nellie," these workers can sap the energy of the entire unit. Because they lack confidence in themselves, they also lack confidence in the supervisor and other workers. From such workers' perspective, any decision they make has a potential for disaster. They are afraid that someone might challenge them, therefore always depend on the BOSS to make the decision. They can spend an inordinate amount of time - double checking the facts, just in case they made a mistake. As a result, they are usually exhausted at the end of the day, with little sense of accomplishment. These workers do not handle changes very well.

Solutions:

- Always approach these workers with gentleness and respect, and a daily dose of reassurance that they are doing a good job. Even when mistakes are made, make sure to be gentle with them, point out the work that was done well and make suggestions for improving the mistake.

- Make sure to engage them in small talk on a daily basis, especially when there is tension in the unit.
- When changes are necessary, find a way to make it look as if these changes came from them. Compliment them about their success in mastering changes.

Confrontation as a last resort, not the first solution

Many people think that one must “like” someone to be able to work with them. Of course it helps and would be much more pleasant to really like our co-workers, but it is not an absolutely necessary ingredient for being able to work together since work is a goal-driven activity. Reviewing what is the *outcome* you are looking for, helps to know how far to go and what methods to use to get there.

When you reach the stage where a “confrontation” is necessary, begin with a clear view of the outcome you can live with. Use collaborative language, with tentative, hedging words at first to solicit the worker’s perspective. This helps you set the tone for possible negotiation. Negotiation is not a “win or lose” stance, but a “give and take” posture. Whatever you face, stay calm and trust that something can be worked out.

Before you confront the worker in anger, make sure to check out with the human resources people the rules and boundaries of what is possible and what is not within the union contracts, and what might be the ramifications of your actions. It is also a good idea to get along with union stewards in your county and learn

about who carries weight within the union. Let the union stewards and human resources people help you with sorting out what is legal and what is allowed within the labor law and the federal and state law.

Strength-Based Case Conference Protocol

What is it?

- It is based on the idea that “two heads are better than one,” and is the best way to foster team building in your unit.
- The goal is to pull together a considerable pool of practice wisdom that can only come from experience among workers in each unit.
- Each unit sets aside a case conference time every week or every other week. Every worker is expected to participate.
- This is where the “difficult,” “stuck,” or “hopeless” cases are brought to the team of workers who can offer helpful hints and alternative ways to look at the client situations and either gather more information or try different strategies that might produce better outcome with clients for the goal of serving children and their families.

How will this help?

- Pulling together the workers' practice experience means looking at the experience of workers on each team as a resource for novices to learn, about best practice in child welfare as well as providing ongoing stimulation and challenges for the entire team of workers.
- No single worker or supervisor, no matter how skilled or experienced, has answers to the very complex and complicated task of working with children and families in trouble. By pooling everyone's wisdom, it is hoped that the best possible solutions to difficult situations may emerge. Many experienced teams find this to be true.
- It saves time for the supervisor. Rather than meeting with individual workers one at a time, the supervisor can brainstorm together with team members about challenging case situations.
- With the support of the team, workers gain fresh perspectives and become more confident in their decisions regarding cases that fall in gray areas.
- Team discussion and support allows workers to stretch their minds and practice a little bit each time, so their confidence in their decision making will be enhanced.

How is it done?

- The supervisor or someone designated by the supervisor chairs the meeting.

- Workers can take turns presenting cases, or can respond to crisis cases, or particularly sensitive or high-profile cases that require approaches beyond routine procedures.
- The supervisor or the chair encourages exchange of ideas, thus building a sense of camaraderie that naturally develops through this collaborative pooling of ideas.
- Not only experienced workers offer and share their experiences. New inexperienced workers offer current ideas and research data they gained from classrooms or other fields such as foster care, corrections, child care, education, and nursing.

What are some useful rules?

- Everyone is expected to use polite language and be respectful of each other's suggestions, judgment, and comments. It is advised to refrain from derogatory remarks about clients or each other.
- A sense of humor is certainly useful and necessary, but not at the expense of clients or other staff.
- In order to preserve and enhance a positive and collegial atmosphere, staff are encouraged to refrain from interrupting others during a case presentation.

- The supervisor's task is to refocus the group's attention to the task at hand and redirect the conversation to be useful to the case presenter and his/her needs regarding the next step.

What are some criteria for selection of cases to present?

- The urgency or the unusual quality of the family's or worker's needs.
- Complexity of the case: multiple, unusually severe, severe and persistent problems that do not seem to respond to agency's past efforts.
- Worker feels "stuck," and is unclear about the direction of a case.
- Worker is unclear about when and how to close a case – lack of specific goals.
- There are specific learning values inherent in the case for the majority of the staff.
- Worker feels overwhelmed by the crisis, complexity, sheer number, and chronic nature of the family's problems, thus leading to loss of hope for the family.
- Similar types of cases reappear over and over among the staff, indicating that learning and teaching may be needed.

When there is no consensus among the unit, the final decision about the case rests with the supervisor and the worker. The meeting is designed to draw on everyone's wisdom and knowledge gained through experience and to be helpful to each other. When the supervisor makes of point of acknowledging the special

expertise of a worker, it contributes to the team building function that a supervisor must perform. This is a good venue for the supervisor to give credit by drawing out and highlighting each worker's specific area of expertise.

Case Conference Presentation Outline

The following outline is suggested to focus the conversation on how to be helpful to the worker who presents a case. The outline may be modified to meet each unit's unique needs.

General posture of participants:

- Attitude of curiosity and discovery of client and worker competence
- Use of positive, strength-based language during case discussions – that is, what is present instead of what is lacking in client, resources, and worker's abilities.
- Bring the client's perspective into the discussion

Presentation outline

- Brief description of how the case entered the system.
- What is the worker's initial assessment on what might be the best way to handle the current case?
- What would the client say the worker has done so far that's been helpful?
- What does the family say are signs of successful contracts at this time?
- What does the family know about themselves that tells them they can accomplish these goals? (Scaling question)

- What do we (program/agency) consider a sign of successful engagement with this family? (Specific, behavioral goals)
- What do we know that tells us the family can achieve these goals? (past successes, current exceptions, scaling questions)
- What has been accomplished toward these goals so far?
- If not ready to close the case, what do the family and agency consider minimum to close the case?
- How will the family and worker know that things have improved sufficiently to close the case?
- What have we learned from discussing this case?

Peer Mentoring

Procedures to organize a Supervisor Mentoring Group

The Transfer of Learning Children's Bureau grant includes an objective of producing strategies to guide supervisors in peer mentorship. Enhancement of supervisory competence through peer mentoring will result in improved worker performance. The modeling of supervisor to worker is designed to transfer from worker to client. Supervisory peer focus groups assisted in the development of the "Guidelines and Strategies." Further, the design of the grant is to disseminate this text state and nationwide.

The following section outlines suggested strategies to help new and experienced supervisors develop peer mentoring groups:

- Enlist the support and approval of the agency director for supervisors who will be participating in a peer mentoring group.
- Present the concept of peer mentoring groups at director and supervisor meetings. Explain the process and the improved staff performance outcomes the agencies can expect. Work to obtain commitments from directors that peer mentoring participation will be considered part of the supervisors' assignments.
- The training Partnership will recruit peer mentoring group facilitators and obtain commitments from the supervisor facilitators who volunteer.
- The training Partnerships will provide in-service training to facilitators on the use of the peer mentoring guidebook.
- Peer mentoring facilitators will form groups within their agency, community, or surrounding geographical area and initiate quarterly sessions.
- The training Partnership will provide meeting support for a nine-month pilot period. This will include setting session dates, arranging locations and informing group members of the session topic. The selection of topics will be determined by group consensus, e.g. teambuilding, managing difficult workers.

- The training Partnership will provide ongoing consultation assistance to the peer mentoring groups, upon request.

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APPENDIX

Child's Death: Management of an Unspeakable Tragedy

Coping with the aftermath of a child's death is the most dreaded, scariest, devastating, and frustrating aspect of child welfare services. Although the incidence of child fatality is, thank God, a rare occasion, even one child fatality is too many. Many participating supervisors in the focus group felt that there should be an alternative to the current system that (can be destructive, brutal, and paralyzing to administrators, managers, supervisors, and workers) and asked that this topic be included in this manual. The following is a list of helpful mindsets, attitudes, and steps that must be agreed upon before it is needed by your agency.

Most public and private child welfare agencies already have a manual for child fatality review procedures and it is strongly recommended that you consult the existing manual and proceed according to the specified steps. Many child welfare services have a great deal of training in the management of child fatality review procedures that has been carefully thought out, in a manner that is legally and ethically sound. Therefore, it cannot be emphasized strongly enough that these official procedures are important channels to review.

Unfortunately almost everybody has a horror story to tell and each tragedy comes in many shades and descriptions that are compelling to tell and to listen to. But the purpose of this section is to plan and implement a more humane,

thoughtful, and gentler approach to dealing with the most difficult event anyone can encounter: a death of a child. It is so difficult and horrible that I'm sure there are no adequate words to describe the impact it has on everyone surrounding the child and family. The following suggestions are not designed to erase or "overcome" the sorrow and pain following such an event but to soften the painful impact that touches everyone's life forever.

Things to remember and to remind each other

It is good to be reminded once more that nobody gets up in the morning and gets ready for a day's work saying to oneself, "How can I make someone's life miserable today?" Nobody! We all set out to do good work each day and we came into the field to make a positive difference in someone's (a child's) life. It is a good idea to remind ourselves of this from time to time because we tend to forget this when we are swept up by events of the day, coping with a mountain of paperwork, and putting out fires. While paying attention to the necessary protocol, which certainly are important, we cannot forget the human side of this tragedy and the long lasting psychological trauma it can create for everyone involved. Do the following first:

1. Stay calm. Take a deep breath and stay focused for a moment. Remember your humanity and stay as calm as you can possibly be in an extremely difficult situation. Try to think of ways to put yourself in the position of the parent, family, and the worker and imagine how you might want to be treated by those around you.

2. It is important to remember that other workers are watching and taking cues from their immediate supervisor. Your first task is to take care of the emotional needs of the staff and the worker who has been affected by the incident, then rest of your unit, and your department.
3. Not only your team but the entire department is closely watching and monitoring to see how you and the management handle this situation, assessing whether they will be the “guilty one,” and whom they can trust. This happens even to those staff who are not immediately involved in the fatality.

On the same day or within 24 hours:

- Contact the worker. You need to reassure the worker that you will go through this entire review process with her and will be supportive of her as much as possible. Ask the worker what she needs immediately. Sometimes, just offering coffee or other drinks to the affected worker can bring tears to her eyes. If it applies, remind the worker she has done a good job for many children so far and will continue to be a good worker in the future.
- Notify the proper person in the chain of command within the same business day: Contact your immediate superior, who in turn will contact the director. If the fatality occurs after office hours, make sure to notify the person in charge, such as the night supervisor on call.

- It is quite normal for the affected worker to second-guess herself and her work. Remind the worker not to form any judgment about what might have happened but reiterate your belief that the facts will come out through the review process. Remind the worker that we are all doing our best under very stressful circumstances doing a most important job: to protect the vulnerable children.
- Preventing an ugly rumor. You may need to call a team meeting and inform them about the status of the review. Be honest about what you know and don't know. Inform them about your understanding of what the next step might be. Solicit their reactions but also ask them to remain calm and supportive of each other. If they hear any rumors, they are to report to you immediately so that accurate information will be passed along. Ask the staff what they need from you, just to get through "today" or "tonight."
- Frequently the other workers in the team become frightened by the incidence and they respond with, "Oh, my God, it could have been me." It would be helpful for the supervisor to voice this shared fear and reassure the staff that you will inform them every step as soon as you can.
- Take some time to collect your thoughts. What kind of help do you need? What will help you to get through the night? Who can be most helpful to you to get through the next 24 hours? Make sure to take a deep breath, slow down to figure out what and who would be most helpful to you during the next

few days. Make sure you use this support person and talk it over, if this is helpful. Practice what you preach.

Within 48 hours:

- Make sure there is a meeting between the staff and management within 48 hours to inform everyone about the latest status of the investigation, procedural steps, and what the management's most current thinking is, and likely procedures and protocol so that everybody will know what to expect. When we don't know, we tend to think the worst.
- The emphasis of this meeting is for the management to extend their concerns and care for the entire staff as well as the affected worker and be supportive of everyone. The management should not use this meeting to issue threats, finding fault, or blame anyone, but to be supportive of the entire staff and find out what the staff needs from the management.
- Management and supervisors need to brainstorm at the end of each day to assess what the staff needs are, what is going well and what areas need further help or changes. Public relations concerns, if any, should be shared with the staff.
- Again, the "unknown" facts about the tragedy cause more anxiety, making the current experience much worse than it needs to be. Acknowledge this fact and keep in touch with the staff without wasting time. Some extremely

anxious staff may need repeated reassurance and information because they cannot integrate all the information until their anxiety is reduced.

Within 3 days:

- A decision about who will represent the agency with the family and who will attend the funeral and burial service should be made and the family members from out of town need to be helped with travel arrangements and places to stay.
- Triage team member will arrange for interviews with the worker in order to collect any and all the pertinent information for the investigation purposes. This may include information from collateral sources about the family, the child, and all the other pertinent people involved in the case. Anticipating this, gathering all information and organizing it would be useful.
- Take some time out and review how you are doing. What do you need from those who care about you to get through this difficult time?

Within 5 days:

- The supervisor, manager, and director of the agency will draft a paper review that tracks the chronology of events that led up to the death. This draft will also include internal reviews and make recommendations for the

agency to implement. The final document will be reviewed and written by the County director or the Executive Director of the agency.

- Stay in touch with the worker and find out what kind of help she needs from you or others.
- It is time to review how you are doing so far. What kind of help do you need now? What and who can be most helpful to you right now?

Within 30 days:

- The director will facilitate the internal review meeting with all the pertinent staff, program manager, and other staff. The purpose of this meeting is to inform and train staff on new procedures and pinpoint possible areas of changes. This meeting can be used as a quality assurance process.
- Grieving process is a very personal and individual. Everyone in the office will go through this process when they are ready and this cannot be forced. Therefore, it is important to be sensitive to the signs of when someone is ready to talk. Do not force the critical incidence de-briefing on those staff who are not ready or are reluctant. Being in contact and letting them know that you are there to listen to them is the best possible way to be supportive of your staff.
- Review your own mental health. What have you learned from this experience? What and who was most helpful? What would you do differently? What would you do the same?

Ongoing Monitoring

Any devastating event such as a death of a child does not come to a closure at the end of 30 days. It alters one's life forever in many subtle and not so subtle ways and the indications of stress may linger for months and years. These signs emerge in many different ways and times. Therefore, supervisors are advised to be alert to any distress signs in yourself, workers, or team members. Everybody reacts to trauma in a very individual manner and feeling forced to "deal with" this experience is felt as intrusive.

Make a point of looking for an opportunity or opening to let your staff know that you are open to discuss their reactions to the child's death, whether at staff meetings, case conferences, or even in individual supervisory meetings, with tact and skill. Remind everybody that it is natural to feel the impact of such tragedy and everybody responds to it in a very personal and individual ways. It is important to be respectful of this individual needs and make a point of asking, from time to time, what they need from you and the team. Do the same with yourself.

- Special thanks to Columbia Heights/Shaw, Washington, D. C. a child welfare agency, for their willingness to share their own child fatality protocol. Much of the material in this section was adapted from their protocol, with their permission, in addition to my personal experiences and observations.

Case Conference/Consultation and Presentation Format

I. For New Cases

Strength based description of the client/family.

What is the client/family's understanding of why you are involved?

Description of what is working already (safety, etc) in the home.

Indication(s) of needed safety to assure family's well-being.

What are signs of successes with this client/family?

II. Consultation/supervision Outline for New and Ongoing Case

1. What does the client want? What is important to the client?
2. What are the signs of success to the client? To the agency/program?
3. What has been accomplished so far toward this goal?
4. How do we/client know he/she can achieve these goals?
5. List past successes – current exceptions to problems
6. How confident and motivated is the client on the scale of 1 to 10 to achieve what he/she wants?

7. Do they know what is the next small step toward achieving goals?

8. Who will do what, when, where, and how to achieve the next small step?
9. What is the confidence/investment to achieve these goals? (scaling question)
10. How will we know it is “better enough” to terminate/close the case?
11. What have we learned from this case?

New Paradigm for Child Welfare Supervision

Goal:

1. To facilitate the development of a competent worker who will make good decision and empower clients to make good decisions.
2. To identify competencies and amplify them through supervision.

Hallmarks:

- Supervision as discovering worker competencies
- Identifying and amplifying worker successes

- Creating a climate of trust and safety in supervision
- Developing a collaborative relationship with the worker
- Using worker's cases to foster skill development
- Using tentative and suppositional language
- Holding worker responsible for their own learning
- Using the worker's frame of reference to increase learning and competency
- Evaluation is ongoing, constant and mutual, therefore, there should be no surprises

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Solution-Building Supervision and Evaluation

(for observation during home calls)

Supervisor: _____ Worker: _____ Date: _____

What did the worker do that was effective? List 3 items.

How can you tell the worker was effective? Check all that apply. The worker:

- _____ developed a "yes set" (got the client to answer with "yes" for minimum 3 times)
- _____ used client's words throughout,
- _____ was friendly and reached out to the client,
- _____ said positive things about the children
- _____ smiled first and knew how to relax the client
- _____ talked in a gentle, soft voice
- _____ noticed positive things about the client, home, and children
- _____ gave full attention to client without correcting
- _____ asked about natural support system
- _____ asked what client is proud of about his/her life
- _____ looked for and commented on existing safety measures
- _____ assumed client good intentions
- _____ accepted and acknowledged client anger without defending
- _____ asked many relationship questions to understand the client's social context
- _____ others: (Please specify)

How did the client respond to the worker? Please check appropriate items.

___ smiled often; ___ friendly to worker; ___ volunteered information;
___ attentive to worker; ___ made eye contact with worker; ___ cooperative;
___ asked for help; ___ confided in worker; ___ talked more than the worker;
___ acknowledged own shortcomings; ___ expressed willingness to take steps;
___ had more positive attitude at the end; ___ had a plan of action.

Other (Please specify):

Client Engagement

The following are important key elements for engaging clients quickly, effectively, and respectfully.

1. Ask permission to do what you are going to do anyway.
"May I have your permission to talk to you?"
"May I have your permission to talk to you children? Where would be the best place for us to have a quiet time to talk?"
2. Spell out the goal/reason for your contact in clear, concrete, and simple language.
"I am here to make sure that your family is safe and to see if there are ways that our agency can be helpful to your children and the family."
3. Accept what the client wants seriously and use it to engage with clients.
"Keeping your family together is important to you and we want the same thing as you, and would like to help you do that, I would like to have a chance to come in and talk to you about services we could offer."
4. Let the client know that you heard them.
"I understand how important it is for you to make sure that your children are safe."
"I can see that you are a very independent person and you have coped with lots of difficulties already."
5. Announce a change of topic.
"Now I would like to ask you some slightly different kinds of questions."
6. Inform the client of every step that may affect them.
"There will be a court hearing in three months to see how things are going for your children and your treatment. At that time, we may also decide what might be the next step for your children."

7. Sustained conversation.
Through conversation we collaborate, influence, make decisions, and negotiate the desirable outcome, steps needed, and so on.
8. Engagement results in the client thinking differently.
The ultimate goal is to help client to think, behave, and feel differently.
9. Depending on the client's state of mind, you may need to repeat this process.

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Scaling Questions

Scaling questions serve to make things more concrete for clients and also to show progress they made and need to make. This tool is particularly useful with clients who tend to think in black/white terms, who have difficulty with abstract ideas.

- On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is your home is not safe at all and 10 stands for it is very safe, what would your child (you) say (if he can talk) that number would be now?
- How long did take you to get to 5?
- What do you need to do to maintain 5? (What do you need to do to keep your 5?)
- How come it's not -3? What are you doing to make sure it is not -2?
- How long would you say you have been at 6?
- What is the difference between 6 and 3?
- What would your best friend say he/she thinks you are at on the same scale?
- What would it take to move up 1 point higher?
- How would your best friend say she could tell you have moved up 1 point?
- When you move up 1 point higher, what would be different in your life? With your child? How would your family life (safety, health, depression, relationship, etc) be a little bit better?
- How confident are you that you will move up 1 point higher? What would your best friend say how confident he/she is that you will move up higher? What will change in your life then?

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Useful Language Skills

- Build a “yes-set” and maintain it to stay engaged with the client.
- Use of “Not-Knowing” skills.
- Using the other person’s key words.
- Tentative language and hedging (for collaboration and negotiation).
- **Use of “How?” or “How come?” instead of “why” questions.**

- **“Suppose . . .” to begin imagining the possible solution and life without problems.**

- **“Instead . . .” To negotiate the presence of solution, not the absence of problems.**

- **Frequent uses of “difference” or “different” to signal emphasis on change:**
“What difference would it make?” “How would that be different?”

- **Self-compliment is convincing, credible, and useful for clients:**
“How did (do) you do it?” (described as admiring commiseration).

- **Relationship question : “What would your best friend say how you have managed so far?” How would your best friend what tell you had a miracle day?”**
- **You must have a “good reasons” for (drinking a lot, not looking for a job, etc). I wonder what might be some of the “good reasons?”**
- **How helpful is that? How would that be helpful? How helpful would your child say that is?**
- **Effective use of silence as a conversation strategy.**
- **“How do you know you can do this?” What do you know about your child that tells you that he/she can do this?**
- **Effective use of educational information to clients:**
 - “Has anybody suggested that you might be drinking too much?”**
 - “What do you think about what they tell you to do?” “Knowing what you know about your drinking history and how you get when you drink, what have you thought about doing about this difficult situation?”**

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Lead-in Questions for Child Welfare Supervisors

Questions that will get you started with your workers following the worker's visit.

Client engagement

What might be the best approach to connect with this mother right now?

You went through quite an effort to find the parent. Are you always this resourceful?

How did you know that listening to her would calm her down? What else?

What would the client say was the most helpful thing you did during your visit?

What would the mother say is most important to her right now? The child?

How could you tell? What did you see or hear that told you this?

What do you suppose is most important to this parent right now? How would you find that out?

How comfortable would the client say she felt talking to you, on a scale of 1 to 10? (10

is the most comfortable one can be, 1 is the opposite.)

What does the client want?

What would the parent say is the most important resource she has right now?

If the child could tell you, what would he say is most important to him right now?

How would you find that out?

What is the mother's idea of how "being left alone" will be helpful to her? To the child?

Questions likely to enhance worker and family safety.

How did you manage to get such useful information? What did you do right?

You seemed to have listened carefully to the mother. How did you do it in such chaos?

How would the mother assess the safety of her child? Her best friend? The child?

How much safety is in this family already? How have they done this?

What does the mother say she needs to do to raise it 1 point higher? How about you?

How confident are you that this mother can raise it 1 point higher?

Tentative assessment of the family's needs.

What does the mother say is the most pressing concern for her right now? The child?

How would you go about finding this out during your next visit?

What is the mother likely to say (or do) when you bring up her own safety issues?

What would the mother say about how that will be helpful to her?

How will you discuss the difference between your perception and hers so that she will listen to your ideas?

Solution-Building Questions for Managers and Supervisors

What would workers say you do to help them be most effective in their work?

What else?

What difference would workers say it makes for them?

On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 stands for not at all useful and 10 as useful as imaginable) how useful would the workers say you are to them in helping them to be effective in their work with the families and children they work with?

What would they say you do that makes it that number?

What would they say would have to be different to make it one or two numbers higher?

What would they say you do that is most helpful to them in their contacts with families and children?

Observations by consultant about the strengths of the supervisor and/or the manager:

Date of the discussion: _____

Consultant signature: _____

Supervisor/manager signature _____