

Supervisory Relationships

Concepts: There are different models of supervision with different stages of development identified and differing constructs describing the interactions. Some commonalities are that supervisors are tasked with developing the competence of the supervisee and protecting the interests and safety of the client throughout. All models of supervision agree that boundaries and expectations must be set in a formalized contract but the real work of quality supervision is found in the parallel process of relationship development between the supervisor/supervisee as the supervisee develops their relationships with their clients. Research has consistently demonstrated the primacy of the “working alliance” in supervision and the necessity of the interpersonal dynamics between supervisor and supervisee lending themselves to trust, openness and truth telling.

Tips for developing a working alliance in cyber supervision:

1. Make sure the contract describes expectations, means of evaluation, maintenance of confidentiality and covers anything that is specific to any technology used e.g. encrypted email, video conferencing, text, phone etc..
2. Make sure there is a clear plan in place for emergencies (especially if you are in different states/time zones).
3. Make sure there is some technical instruction in writing with some troubleshooting tips provided to the supervisee and perhaps one or two practice sessions using the technology, answering questions and ensuring a reasonable comfort level prior to beginning coverage of clinical topics.
4. Ensure there is a plan in place for poor signal, technical glitches or other issues that make the planned supervision unworkable on the chosen platform.
5. Ensure that there is plan in place to discuss or view “work product” – email case discussions or treatment planning, video session observation etc...
6. Ensure that the session is dedicated to supervision whether group or individual and not subject to interruptions and distractions.
7. Develop a working relationship that is similar to what you would have “in person” – get to know the supervisee, share some stories/examples from your practice to enhance the discussion.
8. As the supervisee develops expect the session style to change and become less didactic and increasingly collaborative. Express belief in the supervisee’s ability to provide quality client services.
9. Prioritize the development of rapport as much as the task orientation of the sessions. Both are important.

