

Staffing and Supervision

Tennessee Domestic Violence Shelter Best Practices Manual / Section II



Supervision

Supervision in residential programs is essential to keeping staff engaged, healthy, and able to provide great services to survivors. Supervision must include a concern for performance and an emphasis on learning the skills to be effective.



Supervision has three functions:

- **Administrative:** Ensuring adherence to agency policy and procedure and clarifying expectations.
- **Educational:** Encouraging and developing skills and reflecting on work.
- **Supportive:** Maintaining coworker relationships, encouraging self-care, and ultimately improving morale and job satisfaction.

The first two functions, administrative and educational, focus on the basic needs and performance of the staff member. The supervisor typically guides these two functions. Supportive supervision focuses on the staff's emotional and social needs, and the staff member generally brings forward their needs and concerns in this area. In order to create space for supportive supervision, the supervisor must be available and approachable, provide unbiased perspective, and show grace for a staff member's mistakes and failures when appropriate.

Functionally, supervision can take many forms depending on the size and structure of the organization, but the following are basics that can help point supervisors in the right direction:

- Schedule regular meetings and respect that time. This makes the supervisee feel valued and that their time and relationship is important.
- Look for opportunities to empower the supervisee- for example, ask them to bring topics to the meeting, ask for their input, and encourage them to be daring and think outside the box.
- Document conversations, even small ones. Include dates, topics, and agreements or goals in these notes. This a useful record, as well as a sign that you are focused on the meeting. When performance opportunities arise, having documentation makes it easier to recall strengths and help staff use those strengths to address opportunities.

- Make sure you follow up on the supervisee's, and your, concerns. Let staff know what you found out, what changes you have observed, or even that you are still looking into the concern. This communication is essential to maintaining trust and job satisfaction.
- Engaged Feedback: A supervisor must be ready to ask questions, listen, and accept that they may not have all the information. The purpose of feedback is to foster growth, so give feedback without shame or blame. Supervisors should take a moment to make sure that they are ready to give feedback in a constructive and supportive matter. Most people want to do their best, so it is helpful to assume positive intent and work together with the supervisee to figure out where things went off track.
- Be accountable to your word. Do what you say you will do!
- Recognition: do it swiftly, do it often, and make sure it is genuine. It is important that not all interactions with a supervisor are negative. This breeds fear and insecurity, which will be passed on to the people we serve! It does not have to be a big gesture; a sticky note, card, or an email are often enough. However, it is important to find out how each staff member likes to receive praise. Tailored recognition is very impactful.

Staffing

Finding, hiring and keeping great staff is important to providing the best services to those we serve. Unfortunately, it can be one of the most difficult parts of running a domestic violence program. There is not one right way to hire and retain staff, because it is highly dependent on the area, size and design of the program.

Finding the right people

Staffing is hard work! Staff should be able to stay calm in a crisis, be empathetic, multitask, have healthy boundaries and more. There are many places organizations can advertise an open position, such as local colleges, craigslist, recruiters, web listings (Indeed, Career Builder, Zip Recruiter, Idealist.org, etc.). Consider advertising in multiple places to increase the pool of applicants.

If you are seeking special skills or languages, make sure that you are advertising in areas that draw people with those skills. Consider testing those skills during the interview as well. If you are seeking a Spanish speaker, for example, many people will apply that are familiar with Spanish but who may not be able to speak fluently, so be sure to check language proficiency in the interview.

Interviewing Candidates

Turnover is costly in many ways- from the actual costs of hiring and training a replacement to the low productivity or poor customer service that can happen while the replacement learns the job. To decrease these costs, interviewers must be proficient in hiring the right people for the position.

Critical skills, behaviors and traits that are necessary to do the job well include: performing under pressure, managing multiple tasks excellent communication skills, managing conflict well, and being a team player. There may be additional items that need to be present for specific positions or shelters.

Preparing for the interview is essential. Know what critical skills, traits and behaviors you need for the job, and develop behavior-based questions that address those skills.

Some sample behavioral interview questions:

- Abilities/Skills/Knowledge
 - Describe your experience working with survivors.
 - What skills and knowledge would you bring to this position?
 - Have you ever worked with a client who pushed boundaries? Tell us what the issue was and how you responded to it.
 - Why do DV victims/survivors stay with their batterers?
 - When you started with ABC agency, how did you learn the job and become part of the team?
- Motivation
 - What are your passions? Motivations?
 - Think about a time you learned something new and felt excited about it. What was it and how did you learn it?
 - Why do you want this job?
 - We all have areas for growth and improvement. What is something you have identified as an area for development for you? What are you doing to work toward that goal?
- Fit
 - What pushes your buttons?
 - When were you part of a team effort that you felt good about? What was your role? What were challenges/benefits of the teamwork?
 - What are your current job frustrations that you would like to avoid in a new job?

During the interview, make sure you describe the job objectively, ask behavioral questions- ask follow up questions and confirm your understanding. Behavioral interviewing has at its core the idea that past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior.

Be aware of biases! The more an interviewer is aware of unique biases, the better able the interviewer is to focus objectively on the job related attributes.

In closing the interview, be sure to invite questions from the candidate. Advise the candidate of the time line of the hiring process and next steps. Provide the candidate with a copy of the job description and information regarding the dress, hours, benefits and pay.

In evaluating candidates, it is important to evaluate on the same factors- the critical success factors you developed prior to beginning interviews.

Some things to remember when interviewing:

- Allow silence.
- Make an effort to understand cultural differences and cultural norms.
- Take notes- if you receive personal information, do not write it down.
 - Stay up to date on employment discrimination laws.
- Avoid judgement but make an effort to be genuine and honest in your responses.

Be wary of candidates who:

- Quit a job without notice
- Speak disparagingly about former employers
- Arrive late
- Cannot supply verifiable references
- Reveal confidential information
- Have had many jobs in a short period

Once you have decided on a candidate, follow your agency's process for background checks and all other hiring activities. Ensure that the start date allows you enough time to prepare for the new staff.

Training New Hires

Once the hiring process is complete, the real work begins! The first day is extremely important as it shapes the candidate's impression and expectation of the organization. Make sure someone is waiting for the new hire when they arrive. A tour of the facility and introductions to staff help acquaint the staff. Supply staff with all essential items for the job including a nametag, keys, password or logins, mailbox and other items. If the new hire has an individual workspace, it is nice to have it clean and supplied with all items needed for the work. All of these things give the new hire a sense that they are welcome and that the agency is prepared for them.

Provide the new hire with an employee handbook that outlines all agency policies and procedures regarding employment. It is also best to create a training plan in advance of the new hire's first day. This will outline what their first week or so will be like. It is important to cover all job tasks, expectations, and allow time to practice these skills with supervision. Provide feedback during training and help the new hire acclimate to the agency specific systems and procedures.

Reviews, Feedback and Performance Improvement

Provide your staff with performance reviews on a regular basis. The feedback should never be a surprise, as these things should be discussed during regular supervision. The purpose of a performance review is to assess performance, aptitude and skill. It also communicates the findings in an official way to the employee to ensure performance goals are properly set and met.

Feedback is an important part of a staff's development. It is important to deliver feedback effectively.

Here are some things to remember when giving feedback:

- Be specific.
 - "Niki, you have been 15 minutes late for your last three shifts. Please explain why."
- Consider your timing.
 - "Susan, I'd like to review the content of your presentation before your speech next week so you can do a great job in front of the group." (prior to an activity)
 - "Susan, you did an outstanding job in organizing your presentation for the meeting. The speech was well researched and logical." (after an activity)
- Consider the person's needs.

- “Joe, I know how important it is to you to provide great service to clients, but I can see that you are stressed and tired right now. What do you think would help you care for yourself so you can provide the best service possible to clients?”
- Focus on behavior the person can do something about.
 - “Sam, we would appreciate your keeping the team informed about the status of the project.”
- Avoid labels and judgements by describing behavior rather than evaluating.
 - “Jordan, I have given you the opportunity to complete CPR training three times. What is the barrier?”
- Define the impact on you, the team and the organization.
 - “When you don’t document interactions in a timely manner, other staff are not aware of a client’s status and they can’t provide appropriate services to the client.”

Sometime, even the best feedback does not improve a staff member’s performance. Performance Improvement Coaching (aka, write-ups, corrective action, etc.) is a way to document issues and create a plan for the staff member to improve. Recommended steps include:

- 1) Before the meeting
 - a. Determine actual and desired performance.
 - b. Determine the good business reasons why the problem must be solved.
 - c. Determine logical consequences if the problem continues.
 - d. Determine the appropriate action steps.
- 2) During the meeting
 - a. Confirm that the planned action is appropriate.
 - b. Gain the staff’s agreement to change.
 - c. Determine the actions the staff will take.
- 3) After the meeting
 - a. Document the discussion.
 - i. Include the names of those involved in the discussion, nature of the issue, dates, consequences, agreed upon actions of staff and supervisor, and follow up dates.
 - b. Follow up to make sure the problem has been solved.
 - i. If positive change has been made, provide recognition as appropriate.
 - ii. If not, begin/continue formal discipline process.

Staffing Patterns

There are many different ways to staff a shelter. It will depend on the size, budget, and design of the shelter.

Some shelters use standard shift scheduling where a staff member works the same shift every day. Some use a retail type schedule where the staff will work a variety of shifts and not have a set schedule. Others do a mix of both of those. Don’t be afraid to mix it up and try something new!