

## SOCIAL WORK PRACTICUMS: A GUIDE FOR EFFECTIVE SUPERVISION OUTCOMES

Morehead State University



Social Work Program

All students must work with their field instructors to set regular, weekly supervisory conference times.

- Students are responsible for finding out from their instructor what is expected in these conferences and how to prepare.
- Students are responsible for obtaining field instructor signatures on all practicum assignments (Time Sheets, Individualized Learning Plans, Assessment, and Evaluations)

Students are responsible for understanding the importance of the supervisory structure and roles involved in their practicum placements.

- Students are expected to immediately report to the School any problems or obstacles that interfere with practicum supervision.
- When field instructors have incorporated preceptors into the student's supervisory structure, students are responsible for understanding the roles and relationships involved in this arrangement.

Possible Instruction & Supervision Methods:

Individual conferences	Group supervision
Team meetings	Unscheduled, informal discussions & availability
Ongoing performance evaluation & feedback	Role playing
Coaching	Collaboration/Co-facilitation
Live supervision (one-way mirror)	Reviews of student's client documentation
Review of student's written communication	Verbal reports

### **Setting the Stage for Effective Educational Supervision:**

*What do you need to know about the student?*

- The student's past experience with supervision (positive & negative)
- The student's needs and expectations of supervision
- Cultural differences that may affect communication (age, sex, ethnicity, etc.)

*What does the student need to know about your expectations for the supervisory relationship?*

- Your style of supervision
- Roles and responsibilities for you and the student
- Your availability for scheduled and unscheduled supervision
- Who the student should contact when you are unavailable or away from the site
- When will you meet for supervision and where
- How the student should prepare for supervision conferences (prepared agenda, case summaries, samples of documentation, project summaries, journal, tapes, etc.)

### **Evaluation Expectations:**

*How will the student's performance evaluation be completed?*

- Formal evaluations throughout the course of the practicum (e.g. successful completion of formal trainings, evaluations from presentations given, client feedback, quizzes, etc.)
- Direct access/review of student's work (observation, recordings, reports, etc.)
- The role of other staff (e.g., task supervisor, program manager, trainer, etc.) in providing input on evaluations

## **ESSENTIAL SUPERVISION: GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK**

Feedback is an essential element for the social work student to learn in a safe, supportive environment. It is also a useful tool for indicating when things are going in the right direction or for redirecting problem performance. Part of being an effective supervisor is knowing what feedback to give. The trick is learning how to give it constructively so that it has some value. Constructive feedback is a tool that is used to build things up, not break things down – a very strengths-based, social work approach!

### **SIX WAYS TO MAKE FEEDBACK CONSTRUCTIVE**

1. If you can't think of a constructive purpose for giving feedback, don't give it at all.

2. Focus on description rather than judgment.

Describing behavior is a way of reporting what has occurred, while judging behavior is an evaluation of what has occurred in terms of "right or wrong", or "good or bad". By avoiding evaluative language, you reduce the need for the individual to respond defensively.

For example: "You demonstrate a high degree of confidence when you answer client questions about accessing services," rather than, "Your communication skills are good."

3. Focus on observation rather than inference.

Observations refer to what you can see or hear about an individual's behavior, while inferences refer to the assumptions and interpretations you make from what you see or hear. Focus on what the person did and your reaction.

For example: "When you gave that client the referral form, you tossed it across the counter," rather than describe what you assume to be the person's motivation, "I suppose you give all forms out that way!"

4. Focus on behavior rather than the person.

Refer to what an individual does rather than on what you imagine she or he is. To focus on behavior, use adverbs, which describe action, rather than adjectives, which describe qualities.

For example: "You talked considerably during the staff meeting, which prevented me from getting to some of the main points," rather than "You talk too much."

5. Provide a balance of positive and negative feedback.

If you consistently give only positive or negative feedback, people will distrust the feedback and it will become useless.

6. Be aware of feedback overload.

Select two or three important points you want to make and offer feedback about those points. If you overload an individual with feedback, she or he may become confused about what needs to be improved or changed.

## THE SIX STEP METHOD FOR GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Step 1: State the constructive purpose of your feedback.

State your purpose briefly by indicating what you'd like to cover and why it's important. If you are initiating feedback, this focus keeps the other person from having to guess what you want to talk about.

For example: "I have a concern about..."  
"I feel I need to let you know."

Step 2: Describe specifically what you have observed.

Have a certain event or action in mind and be able to say when and where it happened, who was involved, and what the results were. Stick to what you personally observed and don't try to speak for others. Avoid talking vaguely about what the person "always" or "usually" does.

For example: "Yesterday afternoon, when you were speaking with Mrs. Smith, I noticed that you kept raising your voice."

Step 3: Describe your reactions.

Explain the consequences of the other person's behavior and how you feel about it. Give examples of how you and others are affected. When you describe your reactions or the consequences of the observed behaviors, the other person can better appreciate the impact their actions are having on others and on the team as a whole.

For example: "The staff member looked embarrassed and I felt uncomfortable about seeing this situation. Shouting at our clients is not acceptable behavior in this department."

Step 4: Give the other person an opportunity to respond.

Remain silent and meet the other person's eye, indicating that you are waiting for answer. If the person hesitates to respond, ask an open ended question.

For example: "What do you think?"  
"What is your view of this situation?"

Step 5: Offer specific suggestions.

Whenever possible make your suggestions helpful by including practical, feasible examples. Offering suggestions shows that you have thought past your evaluations and moved to how to improve the situation. Even if people are working up to expected standards, they often benefit from ideas that could help them to perform better.

For example: "Jennifer, I sometimes write myself notes or put up signs to remind myself to do something."

Step 6: Summarize and express your support

Review the major points you discussed. For corrective feedback, stress the main things you've discussed that the person could do differently. End on a positive note by communicating confidence in the person's ability to improve the situation.

For example: "At least we understand each other better since we've talked. I'll do what I can to make sure your priorities are factored into the schedule."