

Gestalt supervision of Psychotherapists, Coaches and Consultants: Advisory Professional Guidance and Governance.

Supervision is one of the most important and influential learning processes for continuing professional development, (CPD), of all Gestalt practitioners. As such, regular consultative and peer supervision is strongly recommended as a core activity for both trainee and accredited, (qualified), gestalt professionals.

The general objective of all supervision is to provide a reflective, stimulating and safe experiential learning environment where supervisees develop. In addition, Gestalt supervision is focused on the application of specialist and technical theoretical Gestalt principles to practice. The primary aim of both development and application to practice is to improve the quality and safety of the service offered by practitioners to clients.

It is recognized that supervision of trainee/non-accredited practitioners carries a differential burden of responsibility for supervisors:

- With regards to Trainee's, where possible and appropriate, supervisors should adhere in the first instance to supervision guidance and governance provided by the trainee's training institute.
- With regards to Non-Accredited Practitioners, the supervisor should satisfy themselves regards which ethical/governance code the individual is practicing under. (For example, there may be alternative suitable qualification as, for example, a mental health/coach or OD practitioner). Where this is not the case, the supervisor will need to consider whether they are prepared to "carry" responsibility for the practice
- With regards to Accredited Gestalt Practitioners, the individual themselves, (as opposed to the supervisor), retains majority responsibility for work undertaken, so "supervision" has a primary consultative function.

Foundational Principles

Gestalt Supervision should be expected to demonstrate:

- *A phenomenological orientation*: to explore the phenomena that occur, without first trying to conceive, understand or lodge them in some theoretical framework. Reflection on, and application of, specialist Gestalt theory *follows* such exploration.
- *A field-theoretical attitude*: while the practitioner describes his relationship and experience with his client, (the practitioner/client field), practitioner and supervisor also explore the field in which they are both located, (the practitioner/supervisor field).
- *An experiential, experimental and dialogic form* of supervision. The experiential process has as a starting point the current situation; staying at and deepening of what is happening in the interaction between supervisor and supervisee, and supervisee and client. The focus is on awareness, process and contact, and on the connections between here and there, now and then, foreground and background and the co-emerging of experiments that promote the learning process.

- *Use of Gestalt diagnostics, risk assessment, ethics, Code of Ethics, (GPO), values base and sharing of theoretical knowledge/information.* Such sharing can be uni or bi-directional depending on skills/experience of both parties and specifics of the supervisory situation.
- *A reflective and reflexive attitude* to both the practitioner's process with the client and the practitioner-supervisor relationship. Such reflection is not a goal in itself but a means to increase the professionalism of the practitioner and the quality of the work. Both supervisor and practitioner should be able to hypothesize on multiple levels what might be emerging in the client and supervisory fields. While this may appropriately raise important personal issues for the practitioner, care should be taken that the relationship remains primarily collegial and not psychotherapeutic.

Working with the client/practitioner relationship

Gestalt supervision focuses on the relationship between practitioner and client. The practitioner explores her/his responsibility for the Gestalt work and does this in terms of Gestalt diagnostics. This means exploring the possibilities and limitations of the client or client system, (team, organization), their forms of contacting, moderations of contact, creative adjustments, fixed gestalts, presenting risks, possible transferences and counter transferences and ethical responsibilities of both the client and practitioner.

In this process, the presence and awareness of the practitioner in relation with the client will be used as a diagnostic tool and as an instrument to improve the quality of the work.

During the supervision, possible interventions or experiments, which can increase the awareness of the client, and their possible impact on the client and practitioner, can be explored.

Working with the Practitioner-Supervisor relationship

The supervisor supports the practitioner in developing and increasing awareness of their own style: ethics and values, approach, moderations, theoretical knowledge, growing edges and strengths.

Attention is also given to the sensations and emotions of the practitioner regarding the client and how these affect the work.

The supervisor also makes her/his awareness concerning the field/relationship of the practitioner with the supervisor, explicit. This enables the practitioner to explore to what extent these aspects are also present in the client field, (parallel processes). The interaction, the form of contacting and the moderations of contact are essential in this.

The supervisor also has the task to judge whether the practitioner is competent to work with the client presented during the supervision. If the supervisor judges that the practitioner is not competent he has to indicate this.

Working as a Gestalt supervisor requires familiarity with:

- *Dialogical Method* as a principle and attitude in the therapeutic/coaching/consulting relationship and in supervision. This includes knowledge and demonstration of Presence, Inclusion, Confirmation and Commitment to Dialogue. Both practitioner and supervisor demonstrate willingness to work in this way in the service of the client work.
- *Field theory* as a way of understanding how one's context influences how one experiences self, other and the wider situation. Both supervisor and supervisee enter the field of the work with the client in a parallel process. Supervision can give awareness of this ground and help the practitioner to recognise what is happening in the relationship with the client.

- *Phenomenological principle* of Gestalt practice. The phenomenological method refers to “as naive and full a description of direct experience as possible” and both supervisor and supervisee recognise that each holds a unique perspective in the field. In supervision therefore, the focus is more on “how” the process of the work evolves than on “why”. The supervisor is not looking for a “true explanation” and recognises that all the members of the field are experts about their subjective relational experience.
- *A Relational attitude* in Gestalt practice recognises that supervision is always interpersonal and involves a systems perspective. It engages in a process of inquiry rather than a search for “truth”. It is a co-emergence of a “new” integration and understanding by supervisor and supervisee that informs the work with the client.
- *Awareness of transference and counter transference* whereby both the client and the practitioner bring their own characteristic ways of organising the field between them based on their particular pasts, which will tend to shape the way they perceive the present.
- *Paradoxical theory of change*. Change does not take place through a coercive attempt by the individual or by another person to change him/her, but it does take place if one takes the time and effort to be what s/he is – to be fully invested in his current positions. A Gestalt practitioner thus fosters awareness of and commitment to a process of inquiry and exploration, rather than a commitment to a particular goal or outcome.
- *Code of Ethics and Values Base with attention to diversity and equality* whereby supervisees are supported to develop appreciation of all forms of diversity and issues of equality. Also to demonstrate awareness and appreciation of ethical decision making with reference to the GPO code of ethics and to initiate appropriate ethical action.

The supervisor needs to be capable of:

- Recognising and articulating her/his own needs for supervision.
- Self-disclosure and aware of her/his own feelings in the process, particularly the feelings of shame and guilt.
- Creating a supervisory contract that is appropriately safe, challenging, supportive, stimulating and motivating.
- Engaging in dialogue with the supervisee in a non-hierarchical way, looking at the supervisee as a partner in a phenomenological learning experience
- Encouraging the supervisee, as far as possible, to view her/him as a learning partner rather than as an expert who knows how therapy/coaching/consulting should be.
- Supporting the practitioner in the supervisory alliance as an active partner in the co-emergence of a relationship and co-emergence of meaning in dialogue.
- Reflecting in a supportive yet critical way on the therapeutic/coaching/consulting process and progress.
- Assisting the practitioner to develop critical reflection on the supervisory and client process and progress.
- Supporting the practitioner to define his/her own questions for supervision, and being able to take “the third person position” when needed, in order to reach a more comprehensive meta-perspective on the process and context.
- Exercising a phenomenological attitude, restraining from premature evaluation of the work as good or bad and putting aside as much as possible fore-knowledge.
- Creating different possible creative experiments in supervision.
- Maintaining a dialogical attitude and ethical stance
- Assessing risks arising in the client and/or supervisory fields and acting to ameliorate these as rapidly and effectively as possible.
- Engaging in creation or re-creation of experience related to practitioner questions in supervision.
- Broadening her/his awareness and ability for contact and supporting the practitioner to do the same. This includes both becoming more aware of her/himself in a holistic way: more aware of her/his body sensations, feelings, thoughts, impulses and intuitive insights and honouring them as a rich source of knowledge about the therapeutic/coaching/consulting situation and self-support for the work.

- Offering the supervision as a third party in the relationship with the client: as grounding and support. This supports the supervisee not to repeat, or become enmeshed in, the client's usual relational patterns but rather be open to new, creative ways of contact during the dialogue with the client.
- Understanding complex inter-relations and the context of therapeutic/coaching/consulting work. In this way, through dialogue with the supervisor, the practitioner becomes more aware of the whole field in which the practitioner and client define each other and are influenced by other elements of a broader field. The functioning of the practitioner or the client is therefore, not an isolated phenomenon that has an "intra-psychic reason", but rather is a function of the field appearing here and now in the relational situation.
- Supporting the practitioner to distinguish her/his own needs and to pay attention to her/his own personal process for her/his own healing or growth. Also supports the practitioner to bracket these needs in supervision and bring them to her/his personal therapy/coaching.
- Recognising and addressing transference, counter-transference and parallel process. The relational situation in supervision gets organised according to similar regularities as the supervised therapeutic/coaching/consulting situation. E.g. the supervisor can start to relate to the supervisee the same way as the client relates to the practitioner. Through this process the practitioner is able, through dialogue with the supervisor, to name transference and counter-transference processes in the supervision relationship and use them as a source of information about a parallel process (which is similar in the supervision relationship and in the therapeutic/coaching/consulting relationship).
- Respecting paradoxical theory of change and diversity in personal styles and cultures.
- Helping the practitioner to recognise her/his therapeutic/coaching/consulting competences and developmental potentials and also her/his professional and personal limits. Supervision helps the therapist/coach/consultant to be who s/he is, so he/she can develop her/his creativity and be aware of her/his skills and limits. The therapist/coach/consultant is able to use this attitude experienced in supervision with clients and thereby improve the quality of service offered.
- Offering experiential learning, relevant experience, theoretical knowledge and modelling. The practitioner should gain inspiration for her/his own therapeutic/coaching/consulting work with clients from the use of these methods by the supervisor, gradually developing a reliable 'internal supervisor' as an integrated representation of quality control.
- Creatively adopting and applying known experience, so that the practitioner can bring the knowledge and skills gained in supervision into her/his work in a creative way and with regard to the actual situation and needs of her/his client.
- Working actively with the Code of Ethics, (GPO), to demonstrate an active, ongoing, intentional application of ethics and values in all aspects of organisational practice. To be able to demonstrate and dialogue regarding all aspects of ethical decision making and values in action with specific attention to issues of diversity, equity and social exclusion.