



supervision

**A reflective tool
for supporting
best practice**

**By Roger Lowe and Russell Deal
with Sue King-Smith**

A guide for using the cards





supervision

First published in 2014. This edition published in 2022 and 2023 by:

Innovative Resources

62 Collins Street Kangaroo Flat
Victoria 3555 Australia
p: + 61 3 5446 0500
e: info@innovativeresources.org
w: innovativeresources.org

ABN: 97 397 067 466

© innovativeresources.org & Roger Lowe 2022

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise) without the prior written permission of the publisher.

ISBN: 978 | 925657 53 |

Innovative Resources acknowledges the Jaara people of Dja Dja Wurrung country, the traditional custodians of the land upon which our premises are located and where our resources are developed and published. We pay our respects to the elders—past, present and future—for they hold the memories, traditions, cultures and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and other First Nations peoples. We must remember that underneath this earth, upon which we so firmly stand, this is, was and always will be, the traditional land of First Nations peoples.

Contents

Introduction to the new edition	4
Putting our cards on the table	5
Strengths-based supervision	7
Solution-focused foundations	9
What is the vision?	11
Embedded narratives	11
Supervising self-supervision	14
Parallel practice	15
The complete deck of cards: suits, topics and questions	17
Suit 1: Setting the scene	19
Suit 2: Sharpening the focus	23
Suit 3: Widening the lens	26
Creating safe spaces for conversations	29
How to use the cards	32
Preparing for supervision	32
Within supervision sessions	35
Between supervision sessions	37
At the end of a supervision relationship	38
Peer and group supervision	40
What else?	41
About the Publisher	41
About the Authors	42
References	43

Introduction to the new edition



Welcome to the latest edition of the best-selling card set *A Vision for Supervision*, now called *supervision*!

supervision is a tool for supporting strengths-based, solution-focused approaches to supervision. The primary aim of these cards is to empower both the supervisor and practitioner to be able to have more curious, nuanced and reflective conversations that will help build the capacity and learning of both.


Not only is this card set streamlined and easy-to-use, it covers topics such as being more inclusive and respectful of diversity, including the client voice, client-centred approaches to practice, how to access different types of supervision and the importance of parallel practice.

All aspects of supervision are covered, from establishing the supervision relationship, setting up strengths-based and solution focussed processes, focussing on reflective practice, building self-supervision skills, creating spaces to explore best practice, reviewing progress over time to generating opportunities to consider the bigger picture.

supervision is part of a suite of Innovative Resources tools designed to support supervision conversations, it includes the card sets *Self-care* and *Walking the Boundaries* and online course *Stepping Into Supervision*.

We hope you find these cards incredibly valuable for having reflective and expansive conversations that empower practitioners, improve client outcomes and build rapport within teams.

Putting our cards on the table

 **At any given moment in a supervision session, we may find ourselves wondering, ‘What is the most useful question I could ask right now?’ This, however, begs another question: ‘What do we mean by a useful question?’**

A branch of strengths-based work, the field of Appreciative Inquiry, has provided a number of guiding ‘assumptions’ that may be helpful here, including the following:

- We live in the worlds our questions create.
- The choice of topics and questions is vital.
- As plants grow towards the light, human systems grow in the direction of their curiosity—toward what they persistently ask questions about.

The usefulness of questions lies in the particular topics that they ‘persistently ask questions about’. The *supervision* cards encourage supervisors to persistently ask questions about practitioners’ hopes, priorities, achievements, strengths, resilience, resourcefulness, creativity, and ongoing professional development. They invite both supervisors and practitioners to live in a world which values collaboration, affirmation, mutual respect, careful reflection and constructive challenge—irrespective of the topic under discussion and the circumstances in which supervision occurs.

In this approach, the supervisor's expertise lies in asking questions that evoke the practitioner's expertise. The supervisor's questions assist the practitioner to find the answers they need, and they have been designed to provide a refreshing alternative to the varieties of deficit-based language that remain pervasive in professional practice and supervision.

This resource can support creative practice in the wide variety of contexts in which contemporary professional supervision occurs. Strengths-based approaches and assumptions provide the foundation for the cards. However, we hope that the cards can make a contribution to your practice irrespective of whether you (or those receiving supervision from you) explicitly identify with a strengths-based perspective.

We also encourage supervisors to tailor the questions to their own circumstances; to reword and rework them, or develop new cards and questions, if necessary. We need to remember that, while supervisors can ask a question with a particular intent in mind, the actual effect of the question is always unpredictable. As Steve de Shazer, the pioneer of solution-focused therapy, often said: In the end, only the client can tell us if a question was useful.

Throughout this booklet, we have referred to the recipient of supervision as a 'practitioner'. We recognise that the supervisory relationship inevitably involves power dynamics and differences in experience—descriptors such as 'supervisor/supervisee' can embed these differences and tend to reduce each person to a narrowly-defined relationship. Instead, we want to highlight the resourcefulness of both people independently of this relationship.

Strengths-based supervision



Supervision ... is a forum for reflection and learning. It is, we believe, an interactive dialogue between at least two people, one (or more) of whom is a supervisor. This dialogue shapes a process of review, reflection, critique and replenishment for professional practitioners. (Davys & Beddoe 2010, p.21)

This definition places interactive dialogue at the heart of the supervision experience and aligns with a strengths-based approach. However, the supervisor's practice framework will influence the nature of the dialogue which, in turn, shapes the process of review and reflection.

Davys and Beddoe (p. 42) suggest that in developing a strengths-based perspective, it is important for supervisors to reflect on the following:

- How do I notice and celebrate success with my supervisees?
- How do I talk about service users in supervision?
What am I modelling about expectations of success and change?
- Does our supervision model match the way we approach our professional practice?
- How often do we highlight what is working well and the times of exceptions to problems?

- What different kinds of power do I utilise in this relationship and what is the impact of this? How important is it for me to be an expert? How do I invite feedback from supervisees and respond to it?
- How do we talk about challenging issues?
- How do I reflect on my own supervision process? What goals do I set for myself?

Compared with other frameworks, the above questions—and those featured on the *supervision* cards—place emphasis on the enabling aspects of supervision (its contribution to professional growth and development) as opposed to the managerial aspects (the monitoring and evaluation of performance and reporting requirements). There is also a relative emphasis on the practitioner’s work and experience, rather than on the practitioner’s clients and their specific issues.

A strengths-based approach to supervision has a focus on three key principles:

- shared responsibility
- shared learning
- shared leadership.

In this supervisory model, all people involved in the supervisory relationship take responsibility for organising, structuring and determining the purpose of supervision. They also share responsibility for the outcomes that result from their decisions.

Strengths-based supervision is a model where all parties learn and grow. It is a process that recognises that both the supervisor and practitioner bring a range of skills and knowledge to the table, and they also have many things to learn. The process of reflecting on practice and exploring different ways to approach challenges builds the capacity and insight of both supervisor and practitioner.

A strengths-based approach includes contributions from a number of different therapeutic models, including solution-focused brief therapy, narrative therapy and positive psychology. However, strengths-based work is not owned by any person or set of ideas, and different supervisors may draw upon quite different traditions.

Solution-focused foundations

Of all the strengths-based models, the *supervision* cards draw particularly on solution-focused therapeutic principles, with their emphasis on cooperation, client-directed goals and client resourcefulness.

In relation to supervision, a solution-focused perspective would ideally involve:

- the practitioner deciding on the purpose of supervision and assessing its usefulness
- the practitioner deciding on the focus and scope of any supervision dialogue
- an emphasis on the practitioner's growth and development, rather than the supervisor's expertise or experience

- encouragement of the practitioner's idiosyncratic ways of working, when these are shown to be successful
- the coaxing of expertise rather than the coaching of expertise, with the supervisor leading 'from one step behind'
- a persistent and detailed focus on the practitioner's hopes and on instances in which this preferred future is occurring—that is, on what is working
- the supervisor knowing and doing as little as possible, and restricting their contribution to the asking of questions and the offering of appreciation and acknowledgment.

In relation to a specific issue in supervision, typical questions may include:

- What are your main hopes for your work with this issue?
- If these hopes were realised, how would that make a difference?
- How would you start to notice these changes occurring?
- How would X, Y, Z (specific other people) notice?
- Have there been times when you've seen signs or glimpses of this new direction?
- What was different about those times?
- What can you take credit for in your work so far?
- How will you know that you are ready to proceed with the dilemma?

While solution-focused inquiry provides a foundation for the card set, they also draw on aspects of several of the strengths-based approaches listed above.

What is the vision?

With the use of these cards, we might expect to see:

- a consistent use of strengths-based dialogue, irrespective of the content of the session
- the supervisor and practitioner working collaboratively to plan a direction for their work, and pooling their personal and professional resources accordingly
- attention to noticing and appreciating developments in the practitioner's knowledge, skills or perspectives
- attention to noticing and appreciating developments in the way supervision is conducted (for example, the practitioner becoming more active in their own reflective processes)
- the supervisor and practitioner collaboratively reviewing the process of supervision and making adjustments where necessary
- the supervisor and practitioner relating their work to its professional context (for example, the various roles, functions and structures of accountability involved).

Embedded narratives: widening the lens and sharpening the focus

If we imagine a supervisor and practitioner discussing a particular topic (for example, a counselling client, a work-related issue or an ethical dilemma), the resolution of that topic does not occur in isolation but becomes part of the ongoing story of the practitioner's life.

As such, it can be worth exploring questions like:

- How does the resolution of this specific supervision topic relate to the practitioner's development?
- Is it a new kind of challenge?
- What new skills have been learned?
- Might it be a turning point in their career?

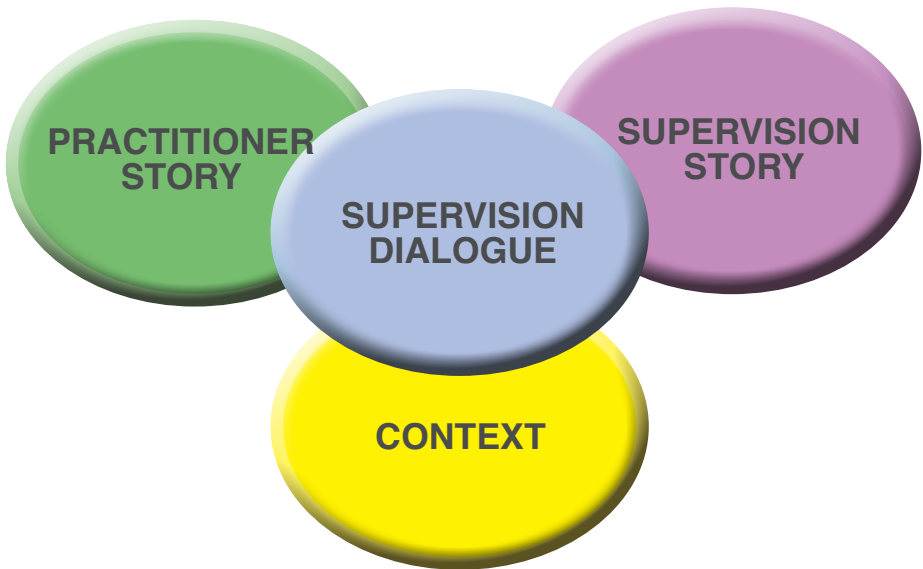
Each individual topic also contributes to the ongoing experience of supervision, which might mean it is worth exploring questions like:

- Has the resolution of this dilemma required a change in the way supervision is conducted?
- Could it mark a transition in the nature of the supervision alliance or signal a new direction?

Another level of narrative relates to the professional context in which the work occurs. This prompts yet another set of questions:

- What other professional, organisational or ethical issues might be relevant in the resolution of any particular supervision topic?
- What other stakeholders are involved?
- Which other voices might need to be included in the discussion?

Like a series of Russian dolls, we can picture a specific supervision topic as embedded in a series of broader narratives (Lowe & Guy 2002). The following diagram illustrates the connections between the immediate issue and the broader stories.



In the foreground is the supervision dialogue of each session, with its focus on the specific priorities of the day. In the background are the broader stories which may come into the foreground on occasion and when appropriate.

Using the analogy of a camera, it has been suggested that therapy (and, by extension, supervision) encompasses two complementary processes: a widening of the lens and a sharpening of the focus: 'The therapist shifts between widening the lens—opening space for new narratives and ideas—and sharpening the focus on solutions and action steps' (Friedman 1997, p.8).

In adapting this analogy to supervision, we want to encourage supervisors to use each session to both sharpen the focus on the specific issues at hand and also to widen the lens, to take in potential developments in the broader practitioner and supervision stories, as well as the context of the work.

It is important to look beyond the resolution of immediate issues and search for opportunities to notice and appreciate connections, developments and turning points in the practitioner's life. These developments can often go unnoticed amidst the 'busyness' of supervision and the imperative to deal with pressing issues.

Supervising self-supervision

One of the developments that will hopefully occur in the supervision story concerns the practitioner's ability to usefully reflect on their own practice, and to use formal supervision to enhance this experience.

If supervision is effective, hopefully the practitioner develops some additional kinds of expertise by learning to:

- discern when assistance is needed and no longer needed
- decide whether and how to implement a suggestion from the supervisor
- have more confidence in their own judgments, and
- reflect on the changing relationship between supervision and self-supervision.

The aim is for practitioners to become self-sustaining; to become more confident and creative in their work, to discern when they need assistance, and how to find that assistance. Rather than simply ‘being supervised’, they are encouraged to identify their particular supervision needs and priorities, and to make these known. By shifting to a stance of supervising self-supervision, the supervisor hopes to encourage the development of these reflective skills (Lowe 2000).

Over time, therefore, the supervisor’s role may shift from supervising the practitioner’s work to supervising the practitioner’s own self-supervision. The cards encourage supervisors to invite this shift in perspective.

Parallel practice

‘Parallel practice’, also known as parallel process, originates in psychodynamic theory and suggests that the dynamics involved in a therapist’s struggles with their clients may be unconsciously replicated or paralleled in the dynamics between the therapist and their supervisor.

A strengths-based perspective is interested in the potential for this process to work in reverse: for the dynamics in the supervisor-practitioner relationship to ‘flow into’ the practitioner-client relationship. ‘Positive parallel process’ (Lowe 2000) refers to the ways in which a collaborative relationship between supervisor and practitioner may facilitate—consciously or unconsciously—a similar relationship between the practitioner and their clients.

Therefore, an important guiding principle for supervisors is to try to interact with practitioners in the same respectful and collaborative ways that they hope practitioners will use when interacting with their clients. If this does not happen, then the strengths-based content of a supervision session can effectively be undermined by a hierarchical or 'power over' process.

In a broader sense, parallel practice can also apply to the way in which organisational values, practices and processes align with the practice approach used in supervision and by extension, the processes practitioners use in their work with clients. If the values, practices and processes don't align at all levels of an organisation, this can have a number of detrimental consequences, including:

- supervisors having to dedicate time and energy addressing the misalignment as they try and find 'bandaid' fixes
- practitioners feeling unsupported by the organisation, confused by the conflicting messages they are getting
- clients feeling frustrated and disempowered by the mixed messages they are getting when they engage with different parts of the organisation or system.

Supervision can be a great place to name any misalignments between process and practice, support practitioners to navigate any challenges presented by these misalignments and advocate for change if necessary.

The complete deck of cards: suits, topics and questions

➔ The complete deck consists of 30 cards arranged in three colour-coded suits with 10 cards in each.

The suits

1. Setting the Scene
2. Sharpening the Focus
3. Widening the Lens

Topics and questions

Each card features a topic on one side and three questions on the other, giving a total of 90 questions in the set. The questions are not intended to cover every aspect of the topic, nor to be used in a fixed sequence. They are 'starter material' to get the conversation going.

While on some cards, the order of questions might contain a logical development, in other cases, the questions initiate different themes within a topic, and these can be explored separately.

There is no expectation that all the questions on a card will be relevant and users are encouraged to adapt the questions or develop their own supplementary questions. The aim of the questions is to open up different paths of inquiry. The supervisor and practitioner will develop each path in their own way.



We have chosen to place the topic on one side of the card and the questions on the other so that people can simply spring into a conversation using only the topic as the prompt. The questions on the reverse of the card can then be used to enrich the discussion once it is underway.

For example, supervisors and practitioners might develop their own conversation on a topic, and then turn over the card to see whether the questions can expand the conversation. Alternatively, they might read the questions first, then turn the card over and begin their own conversation about the topic.

The cards

Below you will find a list of all cards within each suit, presented in a particular order. This is intended to provide a general sense of direction or thematic development rather than a prescriptive order for how the cards should be used.

In any conversation, there will be moments of changing direction, pausing to take stock, going back to the beginning, finding interesting detours, and heading down unexpected pathways. While it may be reassuring to have a general sense of direction, it can be more useful at times to get lost, throw away the map and head off somewhere on the spur of the moment.

Therefore, while the cards are listed in a particular order, we have not numbered them, in order to invite flexibility and improvisation.

Suit 1: Setting The Scene – beginning, contexting and reviewing

At the beginning of a supervision arrangement, there are typically three key questions for a working agreement: Who are we? Where do we want to go? How will we get there? (Davys & Beddoe 2010). This is where we identify what we need to know about each other to work in a respectful, inclusive and productive way. We may create a supervision agreement that outlines the guiding principles for how we will work together.

Once we have established the relationship, it is important to review and reflect on how that relationship is working. Do changes need to be made to the way we work? Are we focussing too much on the managerial aspects of supervision rather than on reflective practice? How will we know if supervision is working well? Is our supervision approach flexible and responsive to changing levels of skill, experience and support needs?

This suit addresses these key questions in a strengths-based way. The 10 topics and accompanying questions invite reflection on the practitioner's story to date, hopes for the future, strengths and skills, roles and responsibilities, ways to include the client's voice, the contribution of previous experiences of supervision, and on the qualities and experiences that both supervisor and practitioner might contribute.

Here are the 10 cards in the Setting the Scene suit:

Supervision agreements

- What should be included in our supervision agreement?
- Are we clear about how we will manage privacy and confidentiality?
- How will we divide our time between managerial tasks and critical reflection?

Roles and responsibilities

- Are we clear about our respective roles and responsibilities?
- Do we have a shared understanding of the purpose of supervision?
- What is the best way for each of us to contribute?

Recording

- What records of our supervision sessions do we need to keep?
- Under what circumstances would these records be shared with others?
- What is the most useful and practical way to record our supervision sessions?



Reviewing

- What signs would suggest we need to change the way we work?
- How will we know when supervision is going well?
- How will we notice, record and reflect upon changes to our work practice over time?

Talking about strengths, experiences and hopes

- What personal, professional and cultural strengths do you bring to your work?
- Does your current work align with your future aspirations?
- What helps you stay inspired and engaged in the work?

Managing differences

- How will we work through differences of opinion or approach?
- What strategies have you used to deal with conflict in the past?
- How will we know it's time to bring someone else into the conversation?

Giving and receiving feedback

- How and when should feedback be offered?
- How can we create a safe space where we both feel comfortable giving and receiving feedback?
- What types of feedback would be most helpful?



Sharing our stories

- What aspects of our work history, learning style, cultural background or identity would be useful to share?
- What else do we need to know about each other to feel respected and safe?
- Are there any previous experiences of supervision you would like to share?

Including the client's voice

- What are some ways we could include the voice of the client in supervision?
- How will we know if supervision has led to better client outcomes?
- How will supervision help us improve our capacity to notice client strengths and capacities?

Being respectful

- How will we know we are being respectful of clients' and colleagues' identities and backgrounds?
- What personal values, beliefs and past experiences may be influencing the way we work?
- What would we notice if we were being more inclusive?



Suit 2: Sharpening The Focus—reflecting on practice

This suit of 10 cards is designed to ground or anchor each supervision session by reflecting on specific issues, appreciating success, naming challenges, talking about self-care, exploring ethical dilemmas, canvassing possibilities and reviewing the session.

The questions and topics are based on broad, solution-focused themes that can be used irrespective of the specific material raised by the practitioner. They tend to focus on the specific issues that the practitioner prioritises on the day and invite in-depth reflection on specific aspects of practice or the work.

Here are the 10 cards in the Sharpening the Focus suit:

Opening the session

- What do you hope will change as a result of our conversation today?
- If these hopes were realised, what would be different?
- What would others notice?

Building on our last session

- Is there something from our last session you would like to re-visit?
- What have you tried since we last met?
- Is anything getting in the way of you making a change?



Noticing success

- What has gone well or better than expected since we last met?
- How have you contributed to this?
- How do you acknowledge or celebrate when things go well?

Appreciation

- What do you appreciate or value about the work you do?
- If clients and colleagues were here, what would they say they appreciate about your work?
- What is a genuine compliment that could be made about your work?

Different types of supervision

- What types of informal supervision do you draw on?
- How do you debrief after a challenging conversation?
- Would peer or group supervision be useful?

Self-care

- When things have been challenging, what helped you keep going?
- How do you look after yourself in these situations?
- What do you do to maintain hope and motivation?



What would the client say?

- If we asked a client, what would they say is the most important thing we could be talking about today?
- What changes do you think clients would like to see in how we work?
- If supervision was successful, what changes would clients notice in our work practice?

Ethical decisions

- What aspects of the work do you find most ethically challenging?
- Are there any situations or elements of the work that you try to avoid or that make you uncomfortable?
- When faced with an ethical dilemma, how do you make decisions?

What else?

- What has already been addressed and what still needs to be explored?
- What else is on your radar?
- Has anything slipped through the cracks?

Closing the session

- What will you take away from this session?
- What are the next steps?
- Do we need to plan our next session?



Suit 3: Widening The Lens—exploring the big picture

The purpose of this suit is to notice broader trends and changes. The topics in this suit invite reflection on things like advocacy, parallel practice, systemic barriers, client outcomes, power dynamics and changes in the sector.

Additionally, this suit focusses on appreciating developments in the practitioner’s work over time and encourages reflection on professional development. Other themes include changes to the practitioner’s sense of identity, the way they respond to challenges and self-supervision.

Widening the Lens also encourages people to be alert to the possibility of turning points or other significant developments.

Here are the 10 cards in the Widening the Lens suit:

Responding to challenges

- Have you noticed any changes in the ways you respond to challenging situations?
- Do particular situations or conversations trigger feelings for you?
- What new skills, strategies and strengths have you developed?

Honing your self-supervision skills

- How do you decide whether to ask for support in a particular situation?
- What helps you have confidence in your own judgement?
- How can supervision help you to continue developing your skills and confidence?



How are we travelling?

- Is the way we are working supporting clients to achieve their desired outcomes?
- What changes could we make to the way we work?
- Does the way we are doing supervision support best practice?

What if?

- What would you do if you had unlimited resources?
- What would you do if you needed to resolve this tomorrow?
- What would have changed if you woke up in the morning and the path forward was clear?

Learning and development

- What do you need to learn, or unlearn?
- How will this support better client outcomes?
- What is the best way to build your capacity in this area?

Parallel practice

- How would the client experience be different if we had a shared and consistent approach across the whole organisation?
- Do our organisational values align with how we work with clients?
- How can we make sure we model best practice in supervision?



Naming power

- How do differences in status or power influence the supervision relationship?
- How do differences in power play out in relationships between professionals and clients?
- What could we do to minimise power imbalances?

Exploring barriers to change

- What is getting in the way?
- Are there any structural or organisational blocks hindering progress?
- What hidden barriers could be at play here?

Advocacy

- What does the client want people to know?
- How can we support the client to be heard?
- Who else could help?

What's changing?

- Have you noticed any new trends in the sector?
- What do you think is just over the horizon?
- What would help us successfully navigate future change?



Creating safe spaces for conversations



It is important to emphasise that the cards are not intended to be either prescriptive or exhaustive in their selection of topics and questions. Any supervision session might take many paths and include areas not specifically included in the cards.

In using the cards, we encourage you to keep several points in mind:

- The cards should not be imposed in a ‘power-over’ way. They are designed to be used with practitioners, not on practitioners.
- It is important that practitioners feel respected, however the cards are used. They should not feel that they are being examined or interrogated by the questions, but rather that the questions are invitations.
- Some questions may need to be reworded or reworked to fit the context and language of individual supervisors and practitioners.
- No hands-on conversational tool works for everyone. Each of us has our own personal taste in language, metaphor and graphical style. Even when you have carefully prepared and created a respectful space, a resource or activity simply may not work for a particular individual or group.
- Questions, no matter how respectfully they are framed, can be very confronting; they can give rise to unexpected memories, fears and associations. Be mindful of this and be prepared to offer support and follow-up.

We can all be caught by unexpected revelations in our conversations so before using the cards, it is important reflect on:

- Your knowledge of the cards. Have you used them before? What did you discover? Do you need to use all of the cards or are there some you can leave out? Is the order in which they are used significant or important to you?
- Your knowledge of those with whom you will be using the cards. Does your knowledge of the culture, age and identity of those you are working with suggest that they will relate to the cards?
- The safety of the setting. Do you believe you have created a ‘safe space’ for people to talk openly and honestly? If you are introducing the cards to a group, what are the dynamics and mood of the group? Is there respect in the group? Is the timing right? Have ground rules such as listening and confidentiality been established?
- Have you thought about how you will enable people to ‘pass’—that is, to feel free to decline an invitation to share or comment if they wish?
- What if the cards elicit strong emotions—if this happens, how will you help ensure that people are cared for during and after the session?
- Valuing people’s different interpretations. Have you thought about how to support different perspectives while also encouraging people to consider other possibilities?

- Your expectations. How do you imagine conversations will flow? What if something different happens? Do you have an alternative plan if something isn't working?
- If you are using the cards in a group, how will you help ensure that 'quiet voices' are heard?
- Setting the context. Have you thought about how to best introduce the cards? Do you want to introduce them with a particular activity? Will you introduce them ahead of time so that the person or people can browse through them at their leisure?
- Time management: Have you allocated enough time for each activity or question you wish to cover? How will you conclude an activity while ensuring that the practitioner has had the time they need or that each person in a group has had their turn to contribute?
- Evaluation: What do you think constitutes 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' use of the cards? How will you find out what worked for participants?
- Follow up: Is there any follow up that you will do with the individual or group before using the cards again?
- Records: Will the cards be used (or not used) in any records that are made of the supervision sessions? How will this be agreed on with participants? Who will 'own' these records and have access to them?

How to use the cards



How the cards are used, and when they are introduced, needs to be negotiated respectfully by all participants in a supervisory relationship.

Traditionally, this is between two people – the supervisor and the practitioner. But increasingly, peer supervision and group supervision are stretching, and adding to, our understanding of ways that supervision can be constructed.

Whatever form supervision takes we believe it is crucial that all parties feel safe, well informed and respected.

There are no prescribed rules for using the cards. They might simply be placed on a desk or table during supervision and only referred to if ‘stuckness’ sets in. Or the whole set might be used sequentially throughout the unfolding of a supervisory relationship.

Preparing for supervision

A good starting point when working with any tool is to take some time to experiment with using it before introducing it to others.

In the case of supervision, supervisors might like reflect on their own supervision practice as a way of preparing for a new supervision journey with another person or group. The various topics and suits can act as a set of prompts or reminders.

Also, supervisors may be aware that they can become stuck in the same conversational grooves, asking the same kinds of questions over and over. If this is the case, the cards can assist supervisors

to move out of their comfort zone and experiment with different kinds of questions. In this and other ways, the cards can act as a form of self-supervision for supervisors.

Here are a few activities to help people become familiar with the cards in preparation for using them in a supervision session:

- Lay the cards out in their respective suits, topics facing upwards, questions downwards. As you look over the array of cards in front of you, consider the context in which you practice supervision, and the ways in which the cards might enhance the experience.
- Which cards represent topics you tend to emphasise or give a lot of time to in supervision?
- Which topics don't seem to come up in your supervision experience?
- Can you choose cards with topics you are most or least comfortable raising in supervision?
- Reflecting on your own experience as a supervisor so far, which cards represent an area of supervision in which you feel you have been most or least useful to the practitioner?
- Which questions do you typically ask?
- Which questions do you tend to return to again and again?
- Can you identify cards with questions you have never asked, or would never ask? Why not? Would you consider incorporating them and if so, how and when?
- Which question would you most/least like a supervisor to ask you?

It is important to be mindful that when practitioners are entering into supervision for the first time they may feel anxious or daunted. There may be many reasons for this – they may have heard *negative* things about supervision from others, lack confidence, fear being judged, and so on. They may also be reluctant to engage if they've had negative experiences of supervision in the past

The supervision cards and booklet can be used to allay some of these fears even before supervision commences. Consider giving the practitioner the full set of cards (or perhaps just the Setting the Scene suit) to take away and use as a basis for their preparation for the first session.

You might use one of the following prompts:

- These cards will give you an idea of the territory we are likely to cover in supervision. Would you like to take them away and browse in your own time before we meet for our first session?
- We will address many of the topics in the Setting the Scene suit in our first session. You may wish to gently reflect on your responses to some of them ahead of time.
- Are there 2 or 3 cards in the Setting the Scene suit that you feel are particularly important for us to address in our first session?
- Are there any questions or topics not addressed in the Setting the Scene suit that you would like us to bring up in our first session?

Using the cards in this way to prepare for supervision may help create a sense of safety, assuring the person that the tone of supervision will be reflective, curious and supportive rather than judgmental or critical. For many people, it may also generate a sense of excitement that the supervisory setting will provide an opportunity for exploration, learning and growth.

Within supervision sessions

When introducing the cards into supervision, you might:

- Lay out the cards on a table at every supervision session and both supervisor and practitioner could select the most relevant or important cards for the day.
- Use the cards occasionally (for example, every third or fourth session) to refocus on key themes or to review change.
- Use the cards on an 'as needed' basis to help with a challenge, impasse or to stimulate new conversations in different areas.

Here are some other ideas for how you might use the cards during a supervision session:

- Spread the cards on the table. The supervisor and practitioner then select a number of cards that are priorities for them, initiating a discussion.
- Some cards might be selected for reflection between sessions and for discussion at the next session.

- If the supervision process has become predictable, the supervisor or practitioner could pick a card at random to stimulate a conversation.
- In ongoing supervision, the sets of cards could simply be present as a reminder of potential topics.
- In group or team supervision, each person could select a card that feels important and relevant at the time and ask the group to respond to the questions on that card.

The topics and questions could themselves become an interesting starting point for reflection on the supervision process:

- Are the topics and questions useful for us?
- How can we adapt them to make them fit our circumstances?
- What is missing from the set?
- In what ways do the cards help or hinder supervision?

In situations where the supervision process seems to have become 'stuck' (for example, over the content of a specific issue) or if the energy in the relationship seems to be waning, the different suits, topics or questions might suggest ways of widening the lens or sharpening the focus elsewhere.

Here are some additional questions that supervisors may choose to ask:

- Which of these cards do you think would be most useful to us at this stage of our conversation?

- Is there a particular card that addresses an issue you have been grappling with?
- Which of these cards feels important right now?

Alternatively, to add a touch of novelty, perhaps a random choice activity could be introduced. Sometimes random choice activities create moments of surprising synchronicity.

- Randomly choose 2 more cards. Do you see any connection between these cards?
- What message might this card have for us?

Between supervision sessions

The supervision cards are a conversational tool—they should not get in the way or become a distraction within supervision. For this reason, it may be useful for practitioners to reflect on a card or cards between sessions. Reflecting on the questions between sessions can allow people the time they need to develop insight or make connections. These reflections can then be discussed within the supervision session, informing the conversation.

If the person uses a reflective journal, the cards can provide a prompt for writing up insights, reflections, thoughts and feelings and can form part of an ongoing record of the supervision conversation. You might ask:

- Is there a card you would like to reflect on between now and the next time we meet?
- Would you like to take the cards home with you and each time we meet, bring one card that you would like to focus on?

- In the time before we meet again, could you write a short reflective piece using one or more of the cards as a prompt?

Another way to use the cards between supervision sessions is as a daily reflective prompt. The cards could be displayed on a practitioner's desk or on a team notice board. They could be replaced daily or weekly so that there is a topic and 'questions of the day/week'.

At the end of a supervision relationship

The cards can also be used to reflect on the end of a supervision relationship. In addition to reflecting on how useful the supervision experience has been, you might include questions about the practitioner's potential to become a supervisor in the future.

Here are a few questions you might ask to reflect on the end of a supervision relationship:

Looking back

- Compared to when we started, how would you describe yourself as a practitioner now?
- How has this changed since the beginning of our work?
- In what areas are you more accomplished and confident?

What's worked?

- What can we appreciate most about how we have worked together?
- What particular experiences stand out as the most important for you?

- What do you think has been most valuable for your clients?
- What can we appreciate about the way we have responded to challenges?

Looking ahead

- Ideally, what form of supervision would you like in the future?
- How would this be similar or different to our present supervision?
- What do you see as the best combination of supervision and self-supervision for you?
- Have your priorities for supervision changed?

Becoming a supervisor

- What kind of supervisor do you imagine yourself becoming in the future?
- What will you take into your own supervision practice from our experience together?
- What will be the key strengths that you offer as a supervisor?

Marking a transition

- How can we mark the transition into the next phase of your professional life?
- Who else would appreciate knowing about this transition?
- What legacy from our work will we each carry forward?

Peer and group supervision

In addition to traditional individual supervision, the cards can provide an engaging and fun way to generate conversation with colleagues in group or peer supervision.

Here are a few suggestions for kicking off discussion using the *supervision* cards:

- Invite participants to choose a topic that interests them for whatever reason, then share it with the group. They may want to put the questions to the group and then initiate a discussion about the diversity of responses or approaches expressed.
- Invite participants to choose one or more cards at random and talk about the relevance of the topics and questions to them personally.
- Participants choose a random card and read out the topic. Without knowing the questions on the back of the card, what questions would they ask to explore this theme?
- Ask participants to each choose a card that identifies or names key themes they would like to discuss.
- Rotate the leadership of the supervision group or peer sessions. Invite the designated leader to bring a practice story or challenge to share, along with a card or cards they would like to use to guide the practice reflection.

If the group communicates via email or social media, questions from the cards could be attached as a 'question of the week' and used as the prompt for an exchange of viewpoints.

What else?

One of the key, never-to-be-forgotten questions from the solution-focused tradition is: ‘What else?’

The *supervision* cards name 30 topics and 90 questions relevant to supervision. What other topics or questions would you include? What else might exist that we haven’t thought of?

No card set can ever be comprehensive. There will always be other questions. We hope that the topics and questions on the cards encourage discussion, learning and more questions than answers! Our benchmark for the success of the cards is the curiosity they inspire.

About the Publisher

Innovative Resources is part of Anglicare Victoria, a community services organisation providing child, youth and family services. We publish card sets, stickers, digital and tactile materials to enrich conversations about feelings, strengths, relationships, values and goals. Our resources are for all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, culture, ability or age. They are used by counsellors, educators, social workers, mentors, managers and parents. We also offer ‘strengths approach’ training and ‘tools’ workshops, both online and in-person.

www.innovativeresources.org

About the Authors

Roger Lowe is a counselling psychologist, whose professional memberships include the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Association of Family Therapy. He is a private consultant based in Brisbane and specialises in strengths-based approaches.

In a previous life (which lasted 26 years), he taught at Queensland University of Technology, contributing to Masters programs in counselling and clinical psychology. His book, *Family Therapy: A Constructive Framework*, was published in 2004 by Sage. He is also the author of several chapters and articles on supervision. Roger continues to offer private supervision and workshop facilitation.

Russell Deal was founder and creative director of Innovative Resources. He has an academic background in social work, psychology and education. He published over 50 conversation-building tools through Innovative Resources. In 2013 he was the recipient of an Order of Australia Medal for services to social work education and the community.

Sue King-Smith is the senior editor and writer at Innovative Resources with a background in online course creation, managing social work services for children and families, writing, lecturing, research and community development.

References

Davys, A & Beddoe, L 2010, *Best practice in professional supervision: a guide for the helping professions*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London.

Edwards, JK 2013, *Strengths-based supervision in clinical practice*, Sage, London.

Friedman, S 1997, *Time-effective psychotherapy: maximising outcomes in an era of minimised returns*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Lowe, R 2000, 'Supervising self-supervision: constructive inquiry and embedded narratives in case consultation', *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 26 (4), pp. 511-521.

Lowe, R & Guy, G 2002, 'Solution-oriented inquiry for ongoing supervision: expanding the horizon of change', in M McMahon & W Patton (eds), *Supervision in the helping professions: a practical approach*, pp. 67-77, Pearson Australia, New South Wales.

O'Hanlon, B & Wilk, J 1987, *Shifting contexts: the generation of effective psychotherapy*, Guilford Press, New York.

Pond, C 1997, 'Highlighting success in groups: Empowering and energising supervisees', in CL Storm and TCF Todd (eds), *The reasonably complete systemic supervisor resource guide*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.

Thomas, FN 2013, *Solution-focused supervision: a resource-oriented approach to developing clinical expertise*, Springer, New York.

Are you a supervisor? Do you receive supervision?

Here is a resource for building strengths-based supervision conversations from start to finish! Supervision plays a pivotal role in professional development for human service professionals. It can be a powerful means of discovery and learning for both supervisor and practitioner—with the benefits flowing on to clients.

Counsellors, psychologists, trainers, mentors, health workers, social workers and anyone who works therapeutically with others can use these cards to:

- create a supervision plan and prepare for each session
- explore values, priorities and practice stories
- train supervisors and guide students
- reflect on practice and evaluate progress
- de-brief, find solutions and help prevent burn out
- create a culture of best practice for the benefit of everyone.

**30 cards arranged in 3 colour-coded suits.
A total of 90 strengths-based questions.
See inside for suggestions for using the cards.**

Innovative
Resources

innovativeresources.org