



ChildProtectionPeak

Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Child Protection Peak Limited

Supervision Framework



ChildProtectionPeak

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QATSICPP Vision

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people are physically, emotionally and spiritually strong; live in safe, caring and nurturing environments within their own families and communities; and are afforded the same life opportunities available to other children and young people to achieve their full potential.

THE SUPERVISION STORY: QATSCIPP

Cultural Supervision Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Services (child protection services) perform valuable work within complex and sensitive circumstances.

When seeking better outcomes for children and families, in accordance with statutory requirements and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Practice Standards, (the Practice Standards) workers need to draw on local knowledge systems of growing up children and their connections to family, community, country and culture. Services must respect the enduring cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and local communities. Workers must be able to manage the complexity that comes from engaging in child protection work in a space often permeated by a profound loss and grief, arising from the history of colonisation and forced removal of children from their families.

To sustain, develop and support workers in this demanding context, culturally-grounded, professional supervision is an essential strategy. Supervision is integral to achieving a strong, sustainable and capable sector able to deliver better outcomes for children and families as required by the Practice Standards. Development of this supervision framework is one way QATSCIPP seeks to promote new learning processes to enhance service provision by child protection services. Formal implementation of this framework will also position organisations to meet Standard 6 of the Human Services Quality Framework: *Effective human resource management systems including recruitment, induction and supervisory processes resulting in quality service provision.*

This supervision framework was developed to promote quality, culturally grounded, professional supervision specific to the unique requirements of child protection services.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

The purpose of this Guide is to provide a framework, accompanied by practical resources, for delivery of culturally-grounded, professional supervision within child protection services.

Implementation of this supervision framework aims to resource the needs and aspirations of:

- frontline staff in working with children, families and communities
- managers in developing excellence in frontline staff through support and leadership
- organisations in ensuring continuous improvement of service delivery and accountability to children, families, communities and funding bodies.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SUPERVISION?

The purpose of culturally-grounded, professional supervision directly aligns with the outcomes sought by the Practice Standards. Supervision exists to:

- achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities
- develop a strong, sustainable and capable sector able to deliver those outcomes.

Strong workers are the vehicle for moving towards stronger families, communities and culture. Supervision develops and supports workers as a way to achieve better outcomes for children and families, moving away from the notion that supervision is 'all about workers' or 'all about the organisation'.

Within this framework, supervision is positioned as a tool for ensuring quality practice in accordance with the Practice Standards, aiming to enhance worker capacity to:

- engage children, families and communities
- assist children and families to identify their storyline
- understand how to help families change their storyline
- help families establish a new storyline.



A NEW STORYLINE FOR SUPERVISION

Storylines, as central to the Practice Standards and integral to culture, provide the foundations for this supervision framework and are fundamental to a new understanding of cultural supervision for child protection services.

The Practice Standards require workers to focus on assisting children and families to identify and establish new storylines. Child protection service delivery also involves a worker story and an organisational story, stories that co-exist with the child and family's story. Every time a worker from a child protection service engages with a child and family these three storylines come together, within a context created by the story of local community and culture.

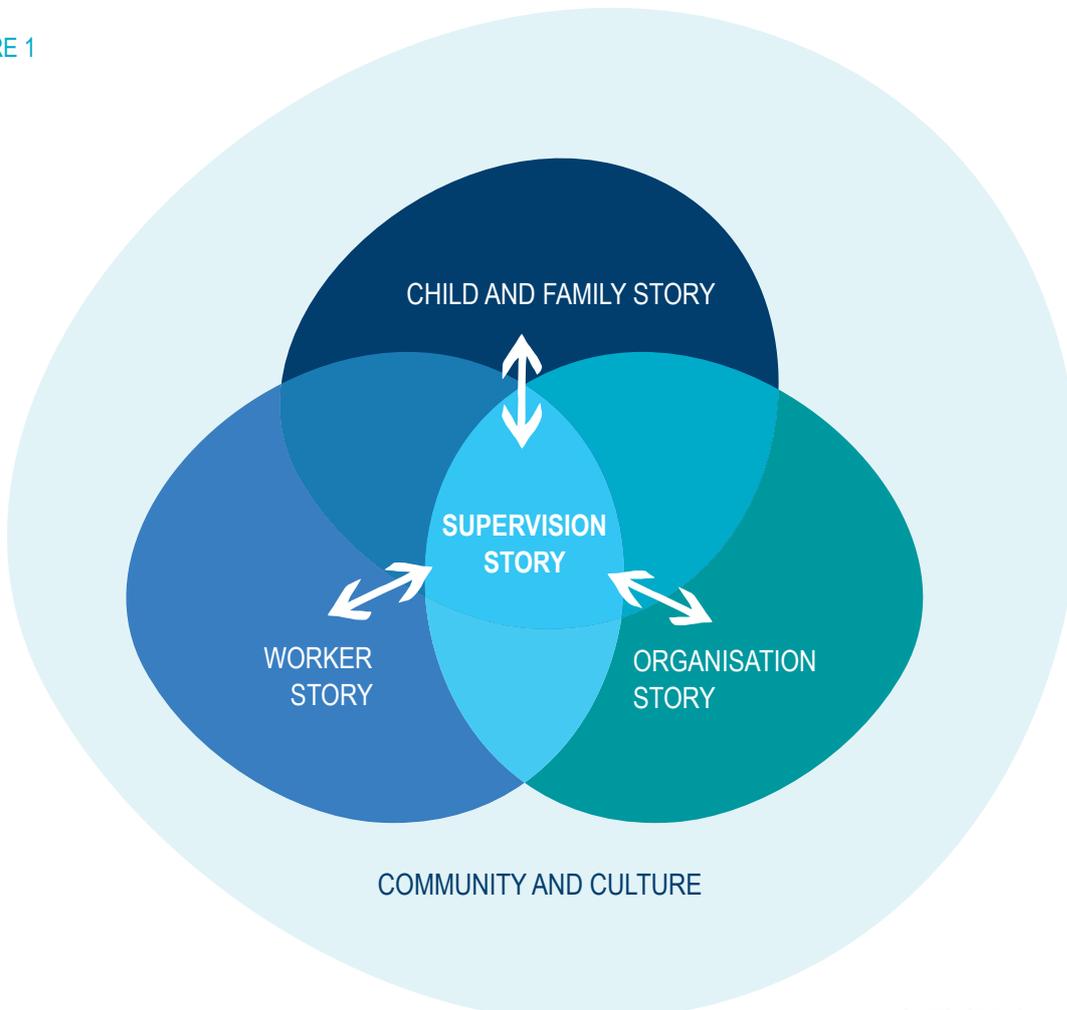
As demonstrated by Figure 1, the supervision story arises from exploring the space created by the intersection of these three storylines, a space which is grounded within the broader story of community and culture. Exploration and development of the supervision story has a dynamic 'flow-on' effect, influencing the storylines, and outcomes, for the child and family, the worker, the organisation, community and culture.

Development of the supervision story can:

- enhance the effectiveness of the worker's engagement with the child and family
- grow stronger workers able to facilitate better outcomes for children and families
- promote organisational quality and value
- strengthen the fabric of community and culture.

Growing the supervision story will encourage a focus on outcomes for children and families, with accountability to community, culture and organisation, through support and development of workers.

FIGURE 1



A DEFINITION OF SUPERVISION FOR CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

For our child protection services, the supervision story is a co-created process, grown and developed by an ongoing, professional and collaborative conversation between a worker and their manager (or nominated person)¹, which is culturally-grounded. This ongoing, professional and collaborative conversation:

- focusses on the stories of children and families and how they can achieve better outcomes
- is informed and oriented by knowledge of local community and cultural traditions
- promotes accountability to children, families, community, culture, and the Practice Standards
- is reflective, developmental and restorative for workers.

This understanding of supervision:

- brings together professional and cultural supervision processes within the one supervision story, processes which are often held separate in other contexts
- positions supervision for our organisations as an 'enabling' process
- encourages a 'power with' approach between worker and manager, not 'power over'
- creates the space to grow and support effective workers, accountable to our children and families, their employing organisation, our communities and culture.

It is important here to differentiate our supervision storyline from performance management processes. While the worker and manager may agree that the supervision story can be used to work on performance issues, the supervision story is much broader than performance management.

¹ The nominated person as the senior worker involved in supervision may hold various titles, for example, 'Manager', 'Team Leader' and 'Senior Practitioner' or may be an experienced worker with particular knowledge/expertise.

Supervision has
three core functions:

- education
- support
- accountability

PRINCIPLES

The principles informing our practice also inform construction and development of the supervision story and the processes used within supervision:

SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

SAFETY AND WELL-BEING

Honesty, self-awareness, empathy, respect, social justice, reflection and a collaborative approach are used to provide a safe place for workers and managers to:

- review and reflect upon the worker's practice – how is their assessment and intervention contributing to the safety and well-being of children and their families, the meeting of their physical, emotional, developmental, cultural and spiritual needs
- explore and support a worker's sense of safety and well-being at work, in their relationships with clients, colleagues, management and stakeholders.

STRENGTHS-BASED

STRENGTHS-BASED

Exploration of the supervision story is supported by a strengths-based approach where worker strengths are recognised, developed and used as a foundation to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families.

PARTICIPATION

PARTICIPATION

Supervision is a participatory process, with the supervision story co-created by manager and worker (or participants within a group setting). Reflective, empathic and strengths-based questioning processes are used to bring the voices of children and families into supervision discussion.

CULTURALLY SAFE

CULTURALLY SAFE

The supervision story is embedded within and informed by knowledge and understanding of the culture and traditions of families and their local community. The cultural values and traditions of the worker are honoured and respected in development of the supervision story.

HOLISTIC

The supervision process provides a space for collaborative reflection between manager and worker upon the stories core to child protection work: the child and family story, the worker story and the organisation's story, as grounded within the broader story of community and culture. Attention is given to each of the functions of supervision: education, support and accountability.

HOLISTIC

PARTNERSHIP

Creation of the supervision story is the responsibility of both manager and worker, or group members, in partnership.

PARTNERSHIP

KNOWLEDGE

The supervision story uses reflective, empathic and non-judgemental processes to construct a safe space for learning, knowledge building and skills development for workers. These processes will build and mature each of these bodies of knowledge for a worker:

- personal knowledge – their lived experience and life stories
- children and family knowledge – the knowledge and experience of children and families
- cultural knowledge – knowledge of local culture and tradition
- professional knowledge – theoretical knowledge, practice experience and wisdom
- research or empirical knowledge – current and emerging research for practice.

KNOWLEDGE

OUTCOMES

Development of the supervision story has a focus on the worker effectiveness in helping to achieve positive outcomes for children, families, community and culture, the worker and the organisation.

OUTCOMES

Functions

Supervision has three core functions: education, support and accountability. Education cultivates knowledge and skill for practice; support explores the personal impact of child protection work upon workers and how this influences their practice; and accountability centres on achieving client outcomes through adherence to legislative, policy and procedural requirements and relevant practice standards².

These three functions are not completely distinct or separate. They often overlap or come together, for example, addressing an educative need for a worker may also be a supportive strategy. At times, some tension between functions may also exist, for example, within internal supervision, where a line manager supervises a worker. The worker may need support with the emotional demands of their work, yet feel reluctant to reveal any vulnerability in case their line manager views this as detrimental to their ability to meet practice standards and accountability requirements.

Within our framework it is the development of the supervision story between manager and worker/s that provides the space for addressing each of these functions. A broad alignment exists between the storylines central to our framework and the three functions of supervision: the education function directly influences the flow of the child and family story, the support function enhances the worker story and the accountability function strengthens the organisation's storyline. Attention within the supervision story to each of these storylines will help ensure that the core functions of supervision are accomplished.

Not only does our supervision storyline encompass these functions, it situates them within an understanding of local community and culture. This understanding includes but is not limited to:

- local knowledge systems for growing up children and their connections to family, community, country and culture
- protocols for engaging with the local community
- managing community expectations and meeting cultural obligations
- the impact of colonisation and the history of forced removal of children upon families today.

Grounding the supervision story in the broader story of local community and culture informs and extends the scope of each function. For example:

- education - what cultural knowledge is important for effective engagement with children and families in this community and how can supervision support knowledge-building around this?
- support - what help does a worker require to deal with the personal impact of working with traumatised children and families within a particular community, so that they remain effective in their work? What can be done within supervision to deliver or arrange for this support?
- accountability function - how can a worker deliver services in a way that is accountable not only to children, families and organisations but also to local community and culture? How does the supervision story ensure that the values, protocols and practices of the local community and cultures are respected in service delivery?

² Supervision Standards 2014, Australian Association of Social Workers.

GROWING THE SUPERVISION STORY: QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STORYLINES

Growing the supervision story between manager and worker will flow-on to influence the child and family's story, the worker's story and the organisation's story. Attention to each of these storylines, within the supervision story, will help to fulfil the educative, supportive and accountability functions of supervision. To promote this, reflective prompt questions are provided for the use of both managers and workers within the supervision story. These questions are not intended to be exhaustive and should be used only as a guide. Use of these questions by both workers and managers is supportive of a 'power with' approach to the supervision story.

CHILD AND FAMILY STORY

The purpose of focussing upon this story within the supervision story is to support the effectiveness of the worker's engagement with the child and family and to consider how they can best help families understand and change their own storylines.

The supervision story provides the space to encourage the worker to reflect upon what is happening within the child and family's story and to consider how their intervention, in collaboration with others, is working to advance the safety and wellbeing of the child and their family. A reflective process and a position of curiosity give workers the opportunity to put words around their use of their knowledge and skills, identify any gaps to be addressed (professional knowledge, cultural knowledge, information about the child and family) and consider how this will help in meeting the practice standards. When workers are helped to make their learning a conscious process, they are better equipped to consciously direct their practice in the future.

QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

- How does the worker understand the child and family's story at this time? What might the worker need (cultural knowledge, professional knowledge for example a trauma-informed approach, empirical knowledge, information from the child and family) to advance their understanding?
- How has the worker assisted the child and family to unravel and understand their own storyline?
- What is currently working well for the safety and wellbeing of the child within the child and family's storyline?
- How does the story of community and culture affect the child and family's story? How does the family live with cultural trauma? What strengths can the story of community and culture offer the child and family?
- What additional knowledge or skills does the worker feel they need to work more effectively with the child and family storyline (cultural, professional, empirical or from the child and family)? How can supervision be used to address this need or support this knowledge-building to occur?
- What is the worker doing to assist the child and family in creating a new storyline that is supportive of growing up strong children? How effective is this?

QUESTIONS FOR WORKERS

- Have I successfully engaged with the child and their family? Do the child and family feel 'known' by me? Do they feel I 'get their story'? What else can I do to support engagement?
- What is my understanding of the child and family's story? How do I think they understand their story? What does this story say about their cultural identity and connection to community and culture? What is missing from my understanding? What would help me to understand their story better? Are their gaps in my knowledge and skill base that need to be addressed?
- How do I challenge the child and family's understanding of their story? How do I help the child and family identify the best of their past story to bring this into a new story for the future? How do I best help the child and family establish a new story for the future? What can I do to help the child and family articulate possibilities for a new story in the future? What do I do to help the child and family develop and work toward this story?
- What does this child and family's story indicate about my learning and development needs? What can be done to meet these needs?

WORKER STORY

The aim of exploring the worker's story within the supervision story is to support and grow stronger workers who are effective in facilitating better outcomes for children and families, strengthening community and culture.

The supervision story is critical to creating a safe environment for helping workers understand their own story and how it influences the unfolding of the child and family's story, the organisation's story and the story of culture and community. Acknowledging and responding to the sensitivities and emotions that come with child protection work, especially when set within the context of our community and cultural history, is an essential step in growing strong workers. Overtime, unacknowledged impacts of the work, coupled with exposure to traumatic stories can lead to secondary trauma for workers, with detrimental effects upon work with families. Exploration of the worker's story, using a reflective and empathic process, will address the support function of supervision by helping workers to manage stress, look after themselves and grow into strong, mature and effective professionals.

WORKERS MAY

- Live and work in their own community, experiencing some tension between their professional role and their personal relationships and obligations within that community. They may feel as if they are always 'on call' and unable to be free of professional demands
- Come from outside the community they work in and need to build knowledge, trust and respect
- Find some child and family storylines deeply distressing, especially if a worker has their own history of cultural or personal trauma and this is triggered by their work with families;
- Experience personal difficulties that, at times, affect their ability to be effective with families and meet the practice standards.

QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

- How does engaging in child protection work within this community impact upon this worker? How does this, in turn, seem to influence the quality and effectiveness of their work with children and families?
- What impact does this specific child and family's story have upon this particular worker? Is this influencing the quality of service delivery to the family by the worker?
- How does this worker's own story (their culture and history, knowledge and skill, professional experience and personal circumstances) interact to affect their response to this child and family within this community? How aware of this influence is the worker?
- What challenges does this worker face in relation to community expectations and cultural obligations? What can I and this organisation do to help the worker manage these expectations and obligations?
- What don't I know about what is going on in the worker's story right now?
- What does the worker believe they need most to grow stronger and more effective?
- What story does the worker wish to create for themselves in the future? How might they go about this? What can I and this organisation do to help the worker in co-creating their new story?

QUESTIONS FOR WORKERS

- What does it mean for me to be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and working with my people in a child protection context? How does my story (personal and professional experiences and current circumstances) impact on how I engage with children and families within a community and cultural context?
- What does it mean for me to be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and working with children and families from my own community? How does my story (personal and professional experiences and current circumstances) impact on how I engage with children and families from my own community and how I work with them to identify and change their storyline?
- What does it mean for me to be an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander worker coming from outside the community I work in? How does my story (personal and professional experiences and current circumstances) impact on how I engage with children and families from this community, and how I work with them to identify and change their storyline?
- What does it mean for me to be non-Indigenous, working within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child protection service? How does my story (personal and professional experiences and current circumstances) impact on how I engage with the child, family and community, and how I work with them to identify and change their storyline?

ORGANISATIONAL STORY

The organisational story is centred on providing culturally responsive, trauma-informed, child protection services to strengthen, heal and protect children, families and communities. Thinking about this storyline within the supervision story supports a worker to meet organisational requirements and grow stronger services. Stronger services benefit children and families and create a safer and more supportive environment for workers in service delivery

To meet our Practice Standards and make a difference to outcomes for children and families, each organisation will have a set of policy, procedural and cultural requirements for service delivery. The life of the organisation depends upon an ability to demonstrate that these requirements are met. The supervision storyline establishes a context for workers and their managers to reflect together upon the worker's role within the organisation's story, to consider how their work, individually and as part of a team, contributes to growing a stronger service, with accountability to children, families, community and culture.

QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

- How does the worker's engagement with the child and family story fit with the Practice Standards?
- What practice decisions, actions or tasks require review and follow-up?
- What organisational and cultural requirements need to be met by this worker and in what timeframe?
- How might you assist the worker to plan their work to help ensure case plan goals and organisational requirements are met within a culturally responsive frame?
- What else could to be done to assist the worker with this?
- How does documentation and recording by the worker fit with the Practice Standards and organisational requirements?
- How do the worker's performance, conduct and behaviour contribute to building a stronger organisation and community? Consider their work with children and families and their interactions with colleagues within their work team.

QUESTIONS FOR WORKERS

- How well do I think I am meeting the Practice Standards in my work with children and their families?
- Do I understand the importance of meeting organisational and cultural accountability requirements and am I sufficiently focussed on this?
- How do I plan and organise my work with children and families? How am I coping with requirements for documentation and recording? What assistance do I need with this from my manager? From other sources?
- What can I do each and every day, to create a supportive work environment and build a stronger service for our community?

STRUCTURING THE SUPERVISION STORY

In child protection services, the supervision storyline is co-created by a worker and their manager (or nominated person), within relationship and is facilitated by reflection, review and empathic discussion. The supervision story will best develop when it is:

- **INDIVIDUALLY FOCUSED**

The supervision story unfolds through individual formal conversations between a worker and their manager conducted in person, or face-to-face wherever possible (using technology to assist with this if required). This provides the best opportunity to reflect on the storylines for child and family, worker and organisation and the space to address education, support and accountability functions. The supervision story for an individual worker may be supplemented by group supervision (conducted by a manager with a number of workers), peer group supervision (amongst colleagues or team members), informal supervision (as events happen in the moment) or 'live' supervision, (where a manager is present while a worker is meeting with a family and may be consulted by the worker during this meeting). However group, informal or live supervision, on their own, without individual time between a worker and their manager for holistic, in-depth reflection and planning, cannot adequately address the storylines and functions of supervision.

- **REGULAR**

Regular meetings that are planned in advance, structure a formal vehicle for the supervision story that encourages relationship, availability, responsiveness and accountability. Both worker and manager are expected to prioritise these planned meetings. Where rescheduling cannot be avoided, this must occur as promptly as possible. Figure 2 outlines timeframes for these meetings dependent upon the worker's experience and length of time in their position. Note that these are minimum requirements, allowing your service the flexibility to provide supervision more frequently or for a longer duration as considered necessary. Some examples of this include situations where:

- an experienced worker, who has worked in their current position for a number of years, is subject to unprecedented personal stress, affecting their work and increasing their need for support on the job
- a worker new to both your service and this field of work appears to be struggling to find their footing and may require more frequent direction, information and support
- a member of staff or a work group have recently dealt with various critical incidents.

- **CONFIDENTIAL**

The supervision story remains confidential to the worker and manager participating in the conversation, within the parameters negotiated and agreed upon at commencement and review of the supervision story. At a minimum, these will consider how to address:

- organisational requirements for reporting on the process, issues and outcomes of supervision. This does not usually require detailed disclosure of content from conversations within the supervision story
- duty-of-care concerns which may arise in relation to the safety and well-being of children, young people and their families, the worker, other staff or management within the organisation, or others from the community
- suspected or actual misconduct, unethical behaviour or practice.

- **UNINTERRUPTED**

Healthy supervision stories are a foundational building block for healthy families, workers, organisations and communities. To allow sufficient time and space for reflection upon the education and support needs of workers and to review accountability requirements, both worker and manager must prioritise planned supervision times. They must commit to these occurring uninterrupted, whenever possible.

- **PLANNED AND PURPOSEFUL**

When first establishing the supervision storyline worker and manager must come to an agreement about how they will structure their work together, including what outcomes or goals they are working toward and document this working from the template outlined in Appendix A. To keep the supervision story focused and accountable, it is critical that ongoing development of the supervision story is regularly reviewed, at a minimum annually, with documentation of this.

- **DOCUMENTED**

Each part of the supervision story must be documented as it unfolds. A brief record of each meeting between worker and manager should be maintained for accountability and practice reasons, documenting issues discussed, decisions made, tasks for both worker and manager, with timeframes for these tasks (see Appendix B for the 'supervision record').

WHAT ROLE DO I PLAY IN THE SUPERVISION STORY?

Usually, within child protection services, the supervision storyline will be cultivated by individual supervision between a worker and their line manager or a worker senior to them such as a Team Leader, Senior Practitioner or Manager.

This promotes the capacity of the supervision storyline to address accountability, support and education functions. Workers in child protection services, particularly those who work in the community they come from, may have kinship ties or close family relationships with their manager. These circumstances may create tension for the worker in managing personal and community obligations alongside their professional responsibilities. In such circumstances consideration must be given to how supervisory arrangements can be structured to support the worker in managing these tensions and to protect accountability to families, the community and the organisation. An appropriate senior member of the organisation must be made aware of any potential conflict of interest and the supervision agreement carefully negotiated with respect to this.

QUESTIONS FOR WORKERS

- Ensure that a supervision agreement has been negotiated and documented.
- Establish a regular time for individual supervision, consistent with the minimum timeframe requirements
- Consider whether a worker's supervision story could be enriched by participation in group or peer supervision, in addition to individual supervision
- Prepare for supervision meetings – try to ensure a comfortable space for us to work together without interruption
- Complete the supervision record with the worker for each session, ensure the worker has a copy
- Maintain confidentiality of supervision within agreed upon limits
- Ensure rescheduling if a session is postponed
- Take responsibility for setting and maintaining a schedule for review of the development of the supervision story with documentation of each review.

QUESTIONS FOR MANAGERS

- Prioritise attendance at supervision appointments according to the planned schedule. Where disruption is unavoidable take responsibility for arranging an alternative time as promptly as possible.
- Arrive prepared for supervision sessions. What issues and questions do I need to make sure are discussed today? What do I need to report on? Do I have any concerns about my work or my supervision that I wish to discuss? Have I thought about how to go about discussing these? What documentation do I need to be able to refer to and do I have that with me?
- Active participation within the session and an openness to being involved in reflection and feedback
- Make sure I am clear on what I need to tackle before next supervision
- Follow through on decisions and allocated tasks.

FIGURE 2 Timeframes for development of the supervision story.

LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE	MINIMUM FREQUENCY	DURATION
Newly qualified workers or workers new to the field (with 2 years or less experience)		
Full-time	Fortnightly	60 minutes
Part-time	Monthly OR fortnightly	60 minutes OR 30 minutes
A worker with 2 years or more experience but new to your service		
Full-time	Fortnightly for 3 months, then monthly	60 minutes
Part-time	Monthly for 3 months, then bi-monthly OR	60 minutes OR
	Fortnightly for 3 months, then bi-monthly	30 minutes
Workers with 2 years or more experience		
Full-time	Monthly	60 minutes
Part-time	Bi-monthly OR Monthly	60 minutes OR 30 minutes

Sourced and adapted from the *Supervision Standards 2014*, Australian Association of Social Workers page 12.



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