

Supervision and Ethics Case Studies

Ethics and Issues in the Supervisory Relationship

1. In a supervision meeting, one of your supervisees details recent events while facilitating a “friendship” group with elementary age children. The supervisee overhears two girls talking about a situation they witnessed on the school bus that morning. Lucinda, one of the girls, stated that her friend was visibly upset during the bus ride because her father had “slapped” her mother this morning. When approached the girls seem willing to discuss the matter and are concerned for their friend. Your supervisee wants to know if she is obligated to do anything with this information?
2. You are a social work supervisor in a community human service agency that provides a variety of services to children and families. Your social work supervisee, Estelle Allyn, has shared in supervision/consultation that her client, Linda Jones, has asked her to pray with her. Estelle has worked with Linda for a few months and knows that she believes fervently in the power of prayer, as does Estelle as well, and she confides that they have begun praying together at the beginning and end of each session. Estelle is seeking your approval and guidance for incorporating prayer into her interventions with Linda.
3. For a variety of reasons, you’ve been unable to schedule a supervision meeting with Sarah (one of your supervisees) for a couple of months. When you’re finally able to meet, she explains that she has fallen far behind in her documentation of services. You’ve heard rumors from other employees that Sarah spends *at least* an hour a day at work on sites like Pinterest and Facebook.
4. You are supervising a social worker, Mike, a professional who returned to school in middle age after having successfully achieved sobriety after years of substance abuse, primarily through Twelve Step participation. Recently however, you have noticed his use of “Twelve Step” language in various types of encounters with clients in different situations, with frequent references to his and/or their “higher power”, “spiritual awakenings”, the undertaking of “fearless moral inventories”, etc. You have noticed that several clients appear confused or even agitated after meeting with Mike.
5. You supervise school social workers in a large urban district. One of your supervisees is working with a new American family as they enroll their child in your school district. The family is of Sikh origin and indicate that their child is required to wear his Dastar (ceremonial headwear) throughout the day and that this includes wearing the Dastar in school. The school currently has a dress code that forbids wearing “hats” in school. Your supervisee is seeking guidance from you.
6. One of your supervisees discloses to you that she has an interest in therapeutic massage as part of her practice, but has not been trained as a massage therapist. The social worker often encourages clients to allow her to massage their shoulders as they talk during sessions.
7. Karla consistently uses all of her vacation time as she earns it by taking a day off here and there after completing the appropriate request forms. Last week, Karla called in to say that she had a bad case of the flu and would probably be out all week. Today, she returned to work, bringing with a note from a doctor stating that she had been sick all week. Your cousin happens to work with Karla’s boyfriend. At a family gathering this evening she tells you that he had won a Caribbean cruise from their employer and that he and his girlfriend (Karla) had just returned.

Practice Boundaries

1. You are a supervisor in an addiction treatment agency. One of your new social workers has been through alcoholism treatment and has remained committed to recovery for seven years. As part of her program, she regularly attends Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, some of which her current clients also attend. She brings this up in supervision and is looking for guidance.
2. In an effort to earn some needed extra money, one of your supervisees moonlights as a bartender at a local bar and grill. The supervisee shares that a number of former and current clients regularly frequent the establishment.
3. A supervisee of yours maintains a public blog that has nothing to do with your agency or employment. Recently the worker posted an entry that voices racist and anti-Semitic views.
4. One of your supervisees routinely conducts extensive google searches and profile reviews of clients on her caseload. Although she insists that she is simply gathering useful information for work purposes, she admits that she is not informing her clients of these activities.
5. A supervisee of yours maintains a “professional profile” on Facebook and encourages her clients to friend her. She uses this page to send out useful information about services and agency programs. She also uses the page to sell health supplements as an independent consultant.
6. You are a supervisor at a group home for adolescents. One of your supervisees has developed a good working relationship with a particularly distraught client. While the rest of the staff tries their best, it seems as though the client only trusts this worker. Upon leaving for the weekend, the social worker leaves her personal cell number with the client in case she has difficulties over the next several days.

Dual Relationships with Supervisees

1. A supervisor who is socially isolated in her personal life spends an inordinate amount of time supervising a staff member with whom she feels a special bond. Although they don't do anything together outside of work, they spend a lot of time together at the office.
2. Your daughter is selling wrapping paper for a school fund raiser. You accompany her around the office as she visits each of your supervisees asking if they would like to place an order.
3. Your supervisee's husband is an insurance broker. She tells you that her husband will give you a “great discount” on automobile insurance.
4. You and your supervisor are attending the same conference together at a distance city. In order to save money, the two of you will be rooming together at the hotel. Upon arrival she invites you to have a drink with her at the hotel lounge.

5. You are a supervisor at a county social service agency. Your spouse has recently applied for a job at the agency. You would not be her direct supervisor, but it is likely that the two of you could end up working on some of the same cases.
6. Your supervisee has a lake cabin that she has decided to rent out on weekends that her family will not be using it. She offers you the cabin at a very discounted rate. You are asked to sign a simple “rental agreement” prior staying at the cabin.
7. While meeting with a supervisee it becomes clear that she is very distraught. She confides in you that she is having some serious marital problems. You initiate a hug with the supervisee and encourages her to tell you about the problems.