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| Resolving Individual workload concerns for Victorian child protection practitioners |
| If conflict arises in the supervisory relationship |

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# Purpose

This document sets out the process for raising and addressing individual workload issues and concerns within the child protection program.

## Supervision

Formal individual supervision is the primary forum for resolution of work-related issues, work planning, practice review, and professional support and development. Supervision includes workload review and case allocation processes.

Supervision where there is unresolved conflict is ineffective, stressful for both supervisor and practitioner, and jeopardises team stability and client services. When conflict occurs within the supervisory relationship, the supervisor and practitioner share responsibility to acknowledge the conflict and to take action to resolve the conflict in a timely way. Issues should not be ignored, minimised or avoided.

The supervisor must be mindful of their responsibilities within the supervisory relationship and acknowledge that practitioners may require support and be enabled to raise issues including workload concerns. Where a workload or other issue is not quickly and satisfactorily resolved between the supervisor and the practitioner, other approaches may include:

* engaging a peer or more senior practitioner to assist resolution of the problem;
  + involving the supervisor’s manager to facilitate an agreed plan and outcome;
  + seeking advice from People and Culture in consultation with the supervisor’s manager.

Where conflict interferes with the supervisory relationship on a continuing basis, the supervisor's line manager must be informed and act to ensure that each party receives effective supervision, support and direction during the resolution period.

At any point, a practitioner who is not satisfied with their supervisor’s response to their concern, or who feels unable to raise a workload or other significant issue of concern with their supervisor, may access the issue resolution process below by raising their concerns to the supervisor’s line manager or requesting the assistance of a peer or workplace representative.

## Operating principles

* DHHS operates in the context of a safe and policy-aware workplace culture
* Supervision is a shared responsibility between practitioner and supervisor
* Supervisors have lead responsibility to ensure that practitioners have a safe and manageable workload
* Available tools and data reporting are used to support safe and equitable workload management and to highlight issues
* Employees are enabled and encouraged to raise workplace concerns in an appropriate, professional, and transparent manner
* Concerns are managed through formal, documented processes which are timely, respectful, solution-focused and strengths-based
* Issues are managed in a non-blaming and non-punitive way
* Privacy is respected
* Service delivery and client best interests are prioritised
* Outcomes and plans are documented and reviewed.

## Individual workload issues and resolution process[[1]](#footnote-1)

Workload issues across the Child Protection program are monitored and addressed via the department’s Area child protection *Workload Review and Monitoring Panels*, however individual requests for workload reviews are not managed by the panels.

Individual workload issues are addressed through the supervision process.

The department also has a number of workplace issues resolution processes to support employees to raise issues formally. These include the *Positive and Fair Workplaces Policy* and the *Review of Actions policy.*

It is recommended that employees and managers work together to try to resolve issues early and locally to prevent matters escalating and requiring referral to a formal process, where possible.

The following are recommended steps to addressing individual workload concerns, including an escalation process where a mutually satisfactory outcome has not been achieved.

## Stage 1.

## Workload or other significant issue is raised by the practitioner within formal supervision and is effectively resolved.

**Matter is resolved**

No further action – communicate the outcome to the practitioner. Subject to ongoing monitoring and review within supervision, supported by use of supervision tool.

## Stage 2.

## Where the matter is not resolved in a mutually satisfactory, timely and sustainable way, or where the practitioner requires third party support they may:

* Request the assistance of a colleague (workplace peer) or workplace representative (for example the Workload Review and Monitoring Panel representative or other team member; union representative) and/or;
* Request involvement of the supervisor’s line-manager. A practitioner may submit a request for review by the supervisor’s direct line manager via email which should briefly summarise the issue(s). Clause 13: Workload, Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2016 sets out the process for employees to request a workload review.
* Where possible, Stage 2 should occur with the supervisor’s prior knowledge and agreement though it can be initiated by a practitioner at any time.
* The line-manager will undertake a review, including meetings and use of data as appropriate (e.g. CRT, Qlikview report). This review may also take into account: case mix, complexity, intensity, and court active cases. It may include the number of children involved in sibling groups, and health and safety issues associated with individual cases. The reviewer will consult others as may be necessary, propose a recommended resolution to the practitioner and supervisor, and will document the outcome of the review.

**Matter is resolved**

No further action – communicate the outcome to the practitioner. Subject to ongoing monitoring and review within supervision (with or without progress reporting to the line-manager) supported by use of supervision tool.

## Stage 3.

## Matter is referred to a People and Culture representative for advice and support:

* Additional advice and support should be sort from People and Culture where the manager/s and employee are not able to resolve issues or have other concerns or questions.
* The People and Culture representative will consider the actions undertaken locally to resolve the issue/s and will provide the parties with recommendations to manage and resolve the issue/s where possible.
* They can also provide guidance on when a matter should be managed under other relevant policies *(Managing unsatisfactory work performance*, *Managing employee incapacity*) or should be referred for formal review via the department’s *Review of actions policy* or the *Positive and fair workplaces policy*.

**Matter is resolved**

No further action – communicate the outcome to the practitioner. Subject to ongoing monitoring and review within supervision (with or without progress reporting to the line-manager) supported by use of supervision tool.

## Where to get further information

1. The Child Protection Manual provides comprehensive information about the management of work, with tools and strategies for managing workload within the program;
2. The ‘Working at DHHS’ tab on the department’s intranet page contains all of the department policies, guides and procedures relating to employment, including the policies referred to in this document;
3. People and Culture can be contacted for advice and support;
4. Employees can also seek additional independent advice and support via the department’s Child Protection Health and Wellbeing Program and the Peer Support Network.

## Related documents

Supervision and principles of work allocation for child protection practitioners guidelines, Child Protection Manual

Clause 13: Workload, Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2016

Clause 22: Resolving disputes, Victorian Public Service Enterprise Agreement 2016

Positive and Fair Workplace policy and Review of Actions policy

1. Supervisors must note:

   this process does not replace the DHHS managing unsatisfactory work performance process.

   where a matter relates to a formal complaint or issue of perceived improper conduct by an employee, the supervisor’s line manager should be advised immediately, and advice requested from People and Culture. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)