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| Supervision and principles of  work allocation for Victorian child  protection practitioners |
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Supervision of child protection practitioners promotes effective service provision to vulnerable children and their families by:

* providing for critical reflection and professional development in child protection practice;
* strengthening workforce adherence to child protection policy and promoting use of the child protection manual to guide and clarify legal and procedural practice responsibilities;
* clarifying expectations and responsibilities for supervisors and child protection practitioners; and
* contributing to employee safety and wellbeing, and workforce satisfaction and retention.

## Purpose of supervision

The purpose of supervision is to give the supervisor and practitioner an opportunity to jointly undertake formal assessment of and oversight in relation to client needs, the practitioner’s professional support and work, health and safety needs, the practitioner’s workload, and the progress of tasks involved in child protection work.

In recognition of the various organisational work units and types of work child protection practitioners undertake, this document aims to provide a guide to employees across the whole child protection program. It includes the work undertaken by the Central After-Hours Service, intake, investigation and response, case management and extended care teams, the various roles in integrated and case contracting teams and specialist roles, such as family violence specialists and court officers.

## Standard for frequency of supervision

**Scheduled or formal supervision is** regular, planned, one-to-one, uninterrupted and held in a private setting between the supervisor and supervisee. Supervision discussions should include people management tasks such as planning and allocating work and managing and recognising performance, as well as casework discussion and planning.

### Practitioners in Beginning Practice

New practitioners and their supervisors must comply with the supervision requirements of ‘Beginning Practice’ (three hours per fortnight). Because new practitioners spend a number of weeks of program in their workplace, this entails the provision of three hours of supervision per fortnight.

### All other practitioners

Beyond Beginning Practice, as a minimum, practitioners and supervisors will undertake the equivalent of two hours a fortnight of supervision (pro rata for part-time employees or if employees are absent from work during the fortnight). Those two hours must include the equivalent of one hour of scheduled (one-to-one, uninterrupted) supervision a fortnight for full time employee (pro rata for part time employee).

## Supervision tools

Supervision tools have been developed to improve the quality, consistency and monitoring of supervision and work allocation.

The Child Protection supervision standards provide further details about the standard and frequency of supervision and should be read prior to using the supervision tools.

Any issues identified in the supervision session should be discussed and outcomes or actions recorded in the action plan.

The supervisor is to keep the original of the supervision tool and give a copy to the practitioner. Supervisors are required to present all supervision tools to their manager and to ensure the supervisor’s supervision tool is completed prior to or during the supervisor’s supervision session with their manager.

## Monitoring

Supervision meetings are recorded in the Child Protection Practitioner Supervision Recording function within the Employee Self Service (ESS) system.

Supervision compliance data recorded in ESS is reported on and discussed at Area child protection workload review and monitoring panel (WRMP) meetings monthly. Supervision compliance reports are provided to deputy area operations managers on a fortnightly and monthly basis.

## Principles of allocating safe and effective workloads

Respectful and open communication between child protection practitioners and supervisors promote relationships that are responsive and sensitive to the professional developmental and personal needs of child protection practitioners. Regular scheduled supervision is regarded as the most appropriate way to ensure the effective service for clients, and optimal and safe workloads for individual employees.

Each supervision session must include:

* a discussion focusing on practitioner caseload:
* consideration of the factors relating to the cases in focus for discussion, including whether they have altered to the extent they have a significant impact on the overall workload the practitioner carries;
* discussion and monitoring of the issues and supports that might impact on the practitioner’s capacity from time to time;
* documentation of the discussion and agreed actions on the supervision templates published on the Child Protection Manual, with a copy retained on the practitioner’s supervision TRIM record.

When allocating work to a practitioner, supervisors must take into account two groups of factors in order to allocate practitioner’s an optimal and safe workload, so they can deliver the best possible service to clients. These are:

1. factors relating to the case
2. factors relating to the practitioner

An optimal and safe workload is one that matches the cases that have the greatest urgency with the number, type and mix of cases and other duties, experience and competence of the practitioner.

Factors relating to the case include:

* the seriousness and complexity of the protective issues
* the availability of other organisations to work with the child and family to address the protective issues
* the phase of statutory involvement and intensity of court activity
* the family’s recognition of and response to protective concerns
* practitioner safety issues
* the level of court-ordered contact or supervised contact
* whether the case is contracted to a community service organisation

Factors relating to the practitioner include:

* the practitioner’s level of experience and competence
* the number of cases currently allocated to the practitioner, and the nature and complexity of the issues within each of the cases allocated to them
* the range of other non-casework duties the practitioner is engaged in
* whether duel allocation with a more senior practitioner should be considered

Factors to consider when allocating a particular case to a practitioner:

* recent stressful experiences in managing cases
* recent similar cases
* time-in-lieu and overtime accrual and use
* family and personal issues
* the practitioner’s current functioning
* the practitioner’s training requirements and experiences
* the practitioner’s developmental stage as a child protection practitioner.

In the first instance, the workload a child protection practitioner manages is a matter for the practitioner and their supervisor to determine during scheduled supervision. Scheduled supervision is also the appropriate forum for individual practitioners to discuss their cases as well as the workload issues that might have an impact on their safety and wellbeing.

In summary, when allocating cases to a practitioner, supervisors need to ensure the practitioner’s work allocation is commensurate with their personal and professional competence and their experience.

## The role of the supervisor

The supervisor’s role is critical to the effective functioning of the child protection program. The primary function of the role is to guide and support practitioners to ensure adherence to relevant legislative requirements and application of departmental policies and procedures.

**Supervision is guided by the following overarching principals:**

* **Managerial:** to promote competent, professional and accountable child protection practice and monitor workloads.
* **Developmental:** to establish a collaborative and reflective approach for learning and provide a focus on continuing professional development and the provision of regular performance feedback between supervisor and supervisee, pursuant to a developmental plan established through the professional development plan (PDP) process.
* **Supportive:** to create a safe context for practitioners to talk about the successes, rewards, challenges, uncertainties and the emotional impacts of child protection work and to monitor practitioner safety and wellbeing.
* **Mediative:** to engage the individual with the organisation and mediate between practitioners, the department and others. The mediative function of supervision is the most influential process through which individual practitioners perceive and relate to the department and child protection. It also provides important upward feedback about the frontline experience.

Supervisors have responsibility to oversee the management and monitoring of work awaiting allocation to a practitioner. If managing work awaiting allocation impedes the supervisor’s ability to effectively supervise practitioners (in accordance with the supervision standards) or to promptly allocate cases where there are significant or immediate safety concerns for the client, the supervisor must advise their manager, so the situation can be reviewed and a strategy developed to enable these two functions to occur efficiently.

Supervisors must take a balanced approach to clients’ needs and the health and safety of practitioners. If difficulties related to caseload management cannot be resolved within the regular supervision process, management is responsible for referring matters through their line management system in the first instance to address the issues.

## Temporary adjustment of workload

From time to time there may be a need to temporarily reduce a practitioner’s workload as a result of the practitioner’s personal circumstances. This can be an effective short term strategy to support a practitioner in the workplace while they address an acute issue. It is recommended that supervisors seek advice from People and Culture where ongoing personal circumstances have a detrimental effect on a practitioner’s functioning resulting in an inability to carry out their duties.

## Factors affecting workload

The following table shows a range of the factors that can contribute to a practitioner’s capacity to manage their workload and suggested strategies for managing them.

| Factor | Potential strategy |
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| Practitioner capability (professional and personal) | Establish and maintain an up-to-date work plan  Identify training requirements and develop a training plan  Provide live supervision (for example, through joint home visit)  Co-work the case  Discuss the practitioner’s wellbeing and supports  Refer to the Employee Wellbeing and Support Program  Make reasonable and temporary adjustment to the workload |
| Workload capacity | Establish and maintain an up-to-date work plan  Co-work the case  Provide additional support to the worker (for example, administrative support)  Consider use of time in lieu and overtime  Review appropriateness of caseload in relation to practitioner’s experience and competencies |
| Workload complexity | Establish and maintain an up-to-date work plan  Identify training requirements  Provide live supervision (for example, though joint home visit)  Co-work the case  Review the appropriateness of the caseload in relation to the worker’s experience and competencies  Consider the number of clients on existing caseload  Review the mix of clients and tasks on caseload  Use case support workers to assist with appropriate tasks  Use specialist consultation services appropriate to cases (mental health, drug and alcohol) |
| Personal circumstances | Establish and maintain an up-to-date work plan  Consider flexible working hours  Consider use of time in lieu, overtime, and recreation leave  Inform the practitioner of the departmental Employee Wellbeing and Support Program  Make reasonable and temporary adjustment to the workload |

## Workload review and monitoring panels

Each Area has an Area Child Protection Workload Review and Monitoring Panel (WRMP). Management, employees, the union and occupational health and safety team members are represented on these panels. The panels are responsible for reviewing and reporting on the demand and distribution of work across the Area and the work streams. Individual workload issues are not reviewed by the panels. Supervision is the primary forum for practitioners and supervisors to discuss and address workload issues and concerns.

## Further information

The *Individual workload review process for child protection practitioners* sets out the escalation process for practitioners and supervisors in instances where matters are not resolved thought the regular supervision process.