

Newfoundland & Labrador Association of  
**Social Workers**

**STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISION  
OF  
SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE**

Adopted June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Standards for Supervision of Social Work Practice	1
Definitions	2
Rationale	3
What is Social Work Supervision	4
How does supervision differ from consultation	5
Standards for Supervision of Social Work Practice (Elaborated)	6
Conclusion	11
Acknowledgements	11
References	12

## INTRODUCTION

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The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers (NLASW) is the regulatory body and professional association for social work in Newfoundland and Labrador. NLASW is responsible for regulating the practice of social work under provincial legislation titled the *Social Workers Act*, SNL 2010, c.S-17.2. The vision is *Excellence in Social Work*.

Social work supervision is to be provided by individuals registered to practice social work in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

## STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

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The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Social Workers originally developed supervision standards in 2003. *Standards for Clinical Supervision for Social Workers* (2003) were developed with the input of social workers with professional practice responsibilities and were reviewed by social workers in direct and supervisory practice.

For the 2011 version, the term “clinical” has been removed to represent the diversity of practice as reflected in the definition of the social work profession. The standards address the foundation of the provision of supervision, the skills required of social work supervisors and set an expectation of what a social worker in practice should reasonably expect. These standards affirm that the purpose of social work supervision is to provide quality service to clients.

### Standard 1

Social work supervision is grounded in the values, ethics and principles of the social work profession.

### Standard 2

Social work supervisors recognize the power and authority inherent in their position within the workplace and exercise that power and authority appropriately.

### Standard 3

Social work supervisors shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and skills about supervision for social workers.

### Standard 4

Social work supervisors should be knowledgeable about the specific field of social work practice of their supervisees.

### Standard 5

Social workers in practice should have access to regular, consistent and structured supervision.

## DEFINITIONS

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### Social Work

According to the International Federation of Social Workers (2000):

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

The *Social Workers Act* defines social work as:

the assessment, remediation and prevention of psycho-social problems and the enhancement of the social, psycho-social functioning of individuals, families, groups and communities by

- (i) providing direct counselling and therapy services to clients
- (ii) developing, promoting and delivering human service programs, including those done in association with other professions,
- (iii) contributing to the development and improvement of social policy
- (iv) conducting research in the science, technique and practice of social work

### Social Worker

In order to refer to oneself as a social worker or to practice within the scope of practice of the social work profession in Newfoundland and Labrador, an individual must meet the criteria for registration as outlined under the *Social Workers Act 2010*. Registered social workers are granted the RSW designation. Use of the RSW designation affirms that the individual has met the criteria for registration and has been granted use of the title and right to practice social work in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### Definition of Clients

Clients include a “person, family, group of persons, incorporated body, association or community on whose behalf a social worker provides or agrees to provide a service or to whom the social worker is legally obligated to provide service” (CASW, 2005a, p. 10). The word, “client,” acknowledges the power differential that exists between giver and receiver of service.

## RATIONALE

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This document is intended to provide the best practice standard for access to and receipt of social work supervision in Newfoundland and Labrador. It solidifies the link between supervision and the ethical responsibilities of social workers and outlines supervisors' skills, expectations of knowledge, modalities and frequency of access.

The NLASW Standards for the Supervision of Social Work Practice are informed by other documents of the profession. These documents include the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics (2005), Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Guidelines for Ethical Practice (2005), the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Analysis of Supervision for Social Work Licensure (2009) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Standards for the Practice of Clinical Social Work (2005).

These standards exist because:

- Social work is a regulated profession with a high degree of legal and ethical accountability.
- Social workers are required to adhere to the provisions of a Code of Ethics, Standards of Practice, federal and provincial legislation and organizational policies and procedures.
- Access to supervision is a critical component of professional development and competent practice. The theoretical knowledge base that informs social work continues to expand and social workers must remain current.
- Social work is a complex profession practiced in an evolving context. The complexity of issues has led to increased specialization and greater diversity.
- Social workers practice in a climate where there are high consumer expectations, a great concern with liability and an expectation of autonomous practice.
- High caseloads and limited resources are a reality.

Social workers in Newfoundland and Labrador are regulated under the *Social Workers Act 2010* and are employed in a variety of practice settings. The majority of social workers are employed in the public and not-for-profit sectors. These standards reflect the practice realities of social work within a variety of organizations including health and residential facilities, government departments and community organizations.

While social work is a diverse profession, the elements of quality supervision are transferable across a range of organizations and programs.

## WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK SUPERVISION?

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Supervision in social work has been uniquely shaped by the practice context. This means that an organizational position usually identified by the designation “supervisor” or “manager” gives one person authority over social workers’ practice with clients. This conceptualization of supervision renders the term “peer supervision” an oxymoron since work place colleagues do not have authority over each other’s practice (Garrett & Barretta-Herman, 1995).

Typically, supervision is a conversational<sup>1</sup> activity between the social work supervisor and social work supervisees. Specifically, social workers have expressed a need for critically reflective conversations, particularly about ethical issues and practice concerns with clients (Hair, 2008). In addition to talking together, social work supervisors should review social workers’ files and create opportunities to directly observe social workers’ practice.

Supervision has a five-fold purpose in order to provide quality service:

- knowledge and skill development
- professional development as a social worker
- support and facilitation of self-reflection
- promotion of social justice
- administrative tasks

For all social workers, access to supervision promotes a deeper understanding of the practice situation and options for intervention. This supports the primary professional obligations of social workers while promoting the best interests of clients by ensuring that practice is based on current knowledge.

Essential components of supervision include:

- Sanction and support by organizations
- Acknowledgement and practice by the supervisor of her/his positional authority
- Meetings that use a formal structure and format
- Meetings that occur during regular scheduled times and take place in a mutually respectful environment
- Opportunities provided for goal setting and a mechanism for ongoing review and constructive feedback
- Direction and enhancement of the work performance of social workers
- Evaluation by and of all participants

The ultimate objective of supervision is to provide clients the best possible service in accordance with the social work code of ethics, practice-based evidence and organizational policies and procedures.

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<sup>1</sup> We have chosen the term *conversation* to acknowledge the active process of talking and listening that occurs between people. The uniqueness of the supervision conversation is identified by the specific qualities and expectations of the participants and the larger contexts of the relationship (Fine & Turner, 1997).

## HOW DOES SUPERVISION DIFFER FROM CONSULTATION?

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In contrast to supervision, consultation is a voluntary relationship for the consultee and the consultant. Authority is not held by or designated to one participant over another. This means that the person providing consultation is not responsible for the consultee's practice decisions (Garrett & Barretta-Herman, 1995). Therefore, peers within an organization can provide consultation to each other. A consultation relationship can also occur with a person outside of an organization for a designated period of time. In those circumstances, a consultant (a) is sought out because of knowledge or skill in a particular area; and (b) is contracted to encourage knowledge and skill development, and/or provide opinions and suggestions for consideration around specific issues or learning needs (Barretta-Herman, 2001; Middleman & Rhodes; 1985; Munson, 2002; Payne, 1994).

## STANDARDS FOR SUPERVISION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE (ELABORATED)

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### Standard 1

**Social Work supervision is grounded in the values, ethics and philosophy of the social work profession.**

All forms of social work practice reflect adherence to the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics (2005) and the CASW Ethical Guidelines (2005). These documents guide both social workers in the provision of social work intervention and social work supervisors in their supervision of social workers.

The CASW Code of Ethics (2005) outlines six core social work values and principles which are integral to these standards. The core values are:

- Value 1: Respect for the inherent dignity and worth of persons
- Value 2: Pursuit of social justice
- Value 3: Service to humanity
- Value 4: Integrity in professional practice
- Value 5: Confidentiality in professional practice
- Value 6: Competence in professional practice

Considering supervision, Value 6 highlights that social workers “have a responsibility to maintain professional proficiency, to continually strive to increase professional knowledge and skills, and to apply new knowledge in practice commensurate with their level of professional education, skill and competency, seeking consultation and supervision as appropriate”. (CASW Code of Ethics, 2005, p.8)

Section 3.4 outlines the specific ethical responsibilities which guide social workers in supervisory roles. These are:

- 3.4.1 Social workers who have the necessary knowledge and skill to supervise or consult do so only within their areas of knowledge and competence
- 3.4.2 Social workers do not engage in any dual or multiple relationships with supervisees when there is a risk of exploitation of, or potential harm to the supervisee. If questioned, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to demonstrate that any dual or multiple relationship is not exploitative or harmful to the supervisee
- 3.4.3. Social workers evaluate supervisees’ performance in a manner that is fair, respectful and consistent with the expectation of the place of employment.



## Standard 2

### **Social work supervisors recognize the power and authority inherent in their position within the workplace and exercise that power and authority appropriately.**

When the authority and power of social work supervisors is established according to *organizational position* (Cooper, 2002), then knowledge can more freely be a co-creative, critically reflective, and supportive process between supervisors and social workers (Darlington, Osmond, & Peile, 2002; Gibbs, 2001; Jones, 2004; Karvinen-Niinikoski, 2004). This means that social work supervisors seek out and value the viewpoints and ideas of supervisees. A desirable outcome is that social workers are encouraged to value their own knowledge and reflective, decision-making abilities.

A collaborative process of knowledge sharing and development is balanced with the positional responsibilities of supervisors. For example, social work supervisors need to (1) be mindful that social workers gain knowledge and skills needed for effective client services within a particular organizational culture and the larger ever shifting socio-political landscape; and (2) be supportive, and if necessary provide directives, during those times when ethical or safety issues appear to mean that social work becomes a deliberate act of social control (for example, calling police when a client is armed and is threatening to hurt someone).

Positional power and authority also means that social work supervisors need to be well informed, not only about the social work code of ethics and standards of practice, but also about preferred social and organizational expectations, and to be transparent about these expectations with social workers. To help make power relations more visible, supervisors need to encourage discussions with social workers about power differences in the supervision relationship and other power relations that exist throughout relationships in the workplace.

The positional power and authority of the social work supervisor also means it is the responsibility of the supervisor to take the initiative to tailor supervision to meet the developmental needs of supervisees. For example, new graduates and less experienced social workers have indicated a need for the expert knowledge of supervisors, especially for advice and planning opportunities about what to do with clients (Hair, 2008). Nevertheless, accessing supervisor knowledge does not mean less valuing of the knowledge and experience of supervisees. Furthermore, when social work supervisors encourage a transparent, critically reflective, collaborative process, then social workers can be confident what information from supervision conversations about ethical issues and practice concerns would be used for staff evaluations and performance appraisals.

### Standard 3

**Social work supervisors shall have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and skills about supervision.**

Examples of the specialized skills and knowledge required by supervisors to provide competent supervision include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Knowledge of theoretical supervision models
- Knowledge of supervisory functions and roles
- Knowledge of documentation requirements of supervisors
- Ability to be planned and purposeful in interactions with supervisees
- Knowledge of diversity and culturally competent practice
- Ability to individualize supervision to diverse personalities and circumstances and the needs of supervisees
- Ability to be effective in the use questions in supervision
- Knowledge of stages of worker development
- Knowledge of adult learning theories and adult learning styles
- Ability to identify learning needs of supervisees
- Ability to assist supervisees to establish measurable objectives for learning and performance
- Ability to support the professional development and the autonomy of supervisees
- Ability to critically appraise and evaluate the supervisee and provide evaluative and developmental feedback
- Knowledge of techniques to be used in supervision
- Knowledge of the theoretical underpinnings of transference, countertransference, boundaries, dual relationships and parallel process
- Knowledge of the impact of stress, distress, burnout and compassion fatigue on supervisees
- Knowledge of the liabilities and responsibilities of supervisors

Expectation of the Supervisor:

- Currently registered social worker
- Experienced, competent & educated in the area of practice
- Have training specific to the provision of supervision and obtains continuing education
- Understanding of the authority and power of the supervisory relationship including concepts of power by position, power by knowledge, power of authority.
- Possesses the ability to engage in critically reflective thinking, the ability to articulate current theories, to demonstrate interventions and techniques, and knowledge of best practices relevant to field of practice.

These qualities are usually found in social workers educated at the MSW level. However, these standards recognize that there is a balance between academic qualifications, continuing professional education, practice skills and experience.

The expectations are important to ensure that high quality services are available to clients.

#### **Standard 4**

##### **Social work supervisors should be knowledgeable about the specific field of social work practice of their supervisees.**

Knowledge about the specific field of social work practice includes an understanding of individuals, families, groups and communities and the appropriate use of therapeutic and preventative interventions relevant to the area of practice. Where supervisors lack sufficient knowledge, there is an expectation that the supervisor will actively acquire the knowledge in accordance with the CASW Code of Ethics (2005) criteria for professional competence.

Areas of knowledge about individuals, families, groups and communities required for effective supervision include the following:

1. Social, psychological, and health factors; and their interplay on psychosocial functioning:
    - a) Theories of personality and behaviour
    - b) Social-cultural influences
    - c) Environmental influences
    - d) Impairment and disability, including mental and emotional conditions
    - e) Physical health
  2. Community resources:
    - a) Available community resources and their operation and how to access them on the client's behalf
    - b) How to identify appropriate services and negotiate a referral
  3. Specific practice skills, including the ability to:
    - a) Establish a relationship of mutual acceptance and trust
    - b) Obtain, analyze, classify and interpret social and personal data, including assessment and diagnosis
    - c) Establish compatible goals of service with the client
    - d) Bring about changes in behaviour (thinking, feeling, and doing) in accordance with the goals of the intervention.
  4. Knowledge and skills in using research to evaluate the effectiveness of a service
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5. In-depth familiarity with social work code of ethics, standards of practice, organizational policy, procedures and legislative requirements

## Standard 5

### **Social workers in practice should have access to regular, consistent and structured supervision.**

Social workers should expect to access supervision within organizations in order to provide quality service, develop social work knowledge and skills, enhance an understanding of social work ethics and values, facilitate self-reflection, increase job satisfaction, and provide valued prevention of emotional exhaustion. The meetings for supervision need to be protected and regular especially for new graduates, inexperienced social workers, and new employees.

- New graduates and beginning social workers: Require at a minimum regular weekly to bi-weekly protected access to supervision during the first two years of practice.
- Experienced social workers entering a new field of practice and/or a different field of practice: Access to a supervisor to build on identified gaps in knowledge and skill, and to ensure the appropriate knowledge base for the specific population and area of practice. A minimum of regular bi-weekly to monthly access within the first year is required.
- Social workers experienced in the field of practice: Timely access on an as needed basis as recognized by the social worker, the supervisor, or organizational policies is the minimum requirement.

Factors that determine how much supervision is required throughout an individual's career include the education, knowledge and experience of the social worker, the level of risk involved in the practice activity and the level of stress experienced by the social worker. Supervision is an interactive process and self-evaluation is a component of all forms of supervision. Supervisees share in the responsibility to identify their learning needs and to actively engage in the supervisory process. A supervision agenda is determined and negotiated according to the needs of supervisees in relationship to the clients.

Supervision may be offered through different modalities including but not limited to a combination of:

- Individual supervision
  - Dyadic supervision
  - Group supervision
  - Reflecting teams
  - Distance using electronic forms of communication and/or video conference devices.
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## CONCLUSION

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The NLASW Standards for Supervision of Social Work Practice (2011) provide best practice standards for access to and receipt of social work supervision in Newfoundland and Labrador. The document outlines key considerations and expectations for those providing and receiving social work supervision. These standards clearly differentiate between supervision and consultation and are intended to guide practice across a diverse range of settings and fields of practice. The ultimate goal is excellence in social work practice.

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