

SUPERVISION AND SUSTAINABLE SELF-CARE TRANSCRIPT

Hi, everyone. Thanks for coming back with us.

Now we're going to head into session five, which is supervision and sustainable self-care. We have explored what it takes to build a career, and now we're focusing on how you sustain it.

And then we have some fantastic PACFA members and experts to join us in this conversation today. Katinka brings over 38 years of experience in psychology and counselling and more than 25 years as a supervisor, supporting practitioners across a wide range of settings. She has worked across both public and private sectors, giving her a broad perspective on supervision at different career stages.

Melissa has over 25 years of experience in psychotherapy and counselling and is an experienced supervisor with a strong focus on relationships, trauma, and practitioner development. She is also actively involved in training, supporting practitioners to build skill and confidence in their work.

And Sophie is joining us again. Sophie draws on more than 10 years of experience in counselling and now supports PACFA members in areas such as ethics, our colleges, and professional standards in her role as head of practice.

Thank you all for joining us. So I think I'm going to start by throwing to Katinka and just asking Katinka if you can talk to us a little bit about what does good supervision look like?

Okay. So, yes, thank you all for allowing me to talk today about supervision, which is my passion.

And as a counsellor for many years and an educator of counsellors and now a supervisor of counsellors,

I really strongly believe the importance of supervision. And so before I talk about supervision and what good supervision looks like, I wanted to ask the audience to have a think about these reflective questions, because I think that will also help you answer some of these questions.

First of all, do you believe that supervision is something that you just have to do to maintain your hours, as some counselors feel?

Also, think about what has your experience been about supervision to date as a supervisee, or if you haven't had supervision before, what word comes to your mind?

Third, has anyone ever talked to you about how to present in supervision?

And also, if you have regular supervision, do you have an initial agreement or a contract?

So, while we talk about supervision, have a think about those questions.

So a good supervision is a good relationship, basically. It's a relationship where the supervisee feels safe, and they feel like they're getting something out of it, which is sort of very similar to the therapeutic relationship that you have, counselors have with their clients.

So, the benefits of supervision are that it's a better client outcome, that you also receive, in good supervision, ethical support and accountability.

Good supervision also provides emotional support and prevents burnout.

Good supervision also increases self-awareness, which is what a bonus, having been part of a profession where it's continuous personal development.

Which profession has that?

Skill development in supervision, building your confidence and professional accountability.

Also, good supervision offers professional identity and growth if you wanted to change careers or find out what your passions are.

And most importantly, good supervision provides risk management.

So I'll stop there.

Thank you, Katinka. Look, I'm sure we're going to have lots of good questions from the audience, so I do remind everyone to use the Q&A function to put some points up for us, because supervision has been discussed or raised a number of times and discussed in the previous sessions.

Now, Melissa, could you perhaps bring your expertise to share with us how supervision and self-care work together?

Okay. It's so interesting I'm talking about self-care today. I'm on the end of a bad cold this week.

So if you can hear that a little bit in my voice, I had to cancel my whole schedule. But I'm here with you today, and I'm feeling well, but just so, so interesting how it happens, that you end up in this place around self-care.

But I think the importance of self-care and supervision is that we're humans, right? We're all nervous systems that are absorbing what's happening, and I think the experience of being a counsellor or a therapist is actually being with another.

And in that experience of being with another, we do absorb what's happening, and so then it comes up around our experiences of burnout, sometimes feeling there may be vicarious trauma that we might experience because we're people and we're relational, and so we do tend to have those experience.

There can be compassion fatigue. Sometimes you can be sitting with a client and just starting to feel you might be generally an empathic person, but start to find, "I'm losing some of my empathy."

And so the importance of supervision, I look at it kind of like a soothing, right? A soothing that helps me feel a little bit safer-And when I'm feeling safer, in turn affects the quality of my work when I'm working with people.

And so the relationship, as Katinka said, is very, very important with your supervisor. But there's something about that relationship where you're able to bring your feelings around not feeling so well, feeling a little bit kind of destabilized, or, "Why am I having angry feelings? Why am I feeling tired?" And feeling tired with a particular client, right?

And starting to ask yourself these questions around why this is happening. In the conversation with a supervisor, and if you have a good supervisor who you have that relationship with, it's able to really help you understand. We will have feelings.

We will absorb what's going on for our clients, particularly around trauma. And we can experience that as burnout, and we can experience it as many things.

So I think being able to use your supervision in a way where you can really sit with our feelings, sit with our experiences, and I kind of call it supervision.

It's kind of like it metabolizes things, because otherwise we end up in a place of, "Why am I feeling this way? Could it be that there's something wrong with me?" Or, "Why am I having a negative feeling sometimes towards a client?" The experience of supervision, if it's really good, is to really normalize all of that, because we absorb a lot. We're doing a lot.

We're privileged to be in this work, and sometimes that really does mean taking on a lot of what's happening for the client that in turn affects us.

Thanks, Melissa. One of the things that I often say about counseling is just how important it is. That is why, if you're an accountant, you don't have to have supervision.

If you're a CEO, you don't have to have supervision.

But clinical roles require supervision because of the importance of the work and because you are working with vulnerable people.

So it really speaks to that value.

Sophie, would you be able to give us a bit of an outline about some of the things

that PACFA identifies around supervision?

We do have a question online, which is about whether there's a list of supervisors available, which of course there is in our Find a Therapist directory, but also just that broader PACFA picture for people.

Yeah. So we do, we have a Find a Therapist supervision, a tab so you can find a certified supervisor there. We also have our certified supervisors who offer low-cost group supervision, which can be helpful.

We have our clinical supervision standard that speaks about what the requirements are for your renewals, but it also speaks about what is considered supervision and what might not be.

And it's interesting to think about the type of supervision that's going to be best for you in the different parts of your career, whether you're just starting out, as you move through as well, whether that is individual or group.

And then we've got from, I guess, a PACFA perspective, the national standards have been released, and we align with the national standards around the supervision.

The probably key difference is that the national standards say that clinical registrants are who can provide supervision, which makes perfect sense. You want your more experienced clinicians to be providing supervision to the supervisees.

So, yeah.

Great.

Could I perhaps get the thoughts of the group on the use of group supervision versus individual supervision, when, where that's most appropriate, and how that fits together? Katinka, can I start with you?

Yes.

Because I have training in group work, I love group supervision, and I've seen the benefits of new counsellors or students who are starting out because they gain that peer support at the same time. And group supervision doesn't have to be just about presenting a case. Group supervision could be about talking about a theory, practicing an intervention amongst peers who support you and who are perhaps at the same stage.

But also, if you have group supervision that includes experienced counsellors, that also adds value to that group supervision.

So I think if counsellors can obtain experience in both, it would be very valuable.

Melissa?

I think the benefits of group supervision, it's those aha moments when it's kind of like you're questioning yourself, "Why am I feeling this way? Why am I sometimes with one client and not another having some negative feelings?" And so sitting in group supervision, you get those times when somebody will bring a case or they'll be talking about their supervision and kind of say, and it normalizes it for you.

Because otherwise, if we keep kind of feeling like, which is we're vulnerable to, "Gee, why am I having these feelings sometimes with particular clients?" And then you're sitting in group supervision and hearing that others are experiencing the exact same kind of feelings, or negative feelings, positive feelings, whatever it might be.

It really helps normalize, and it really gives you that aha moment, as well as what I said earlier around some soothing around how we're feeling.

Great.

And perhaps so we could have some thoughts about, and I'll start with you, Sophie, about when people should start getting supervision. You know, in relation to what point of their career or whereabouts in their training, how does that all fit together?

And what is the role of supervision in that early time? Look, I don't think it's ever too soon to get a supervisor. I think a lot of people, especially if they're going into private practice, they look at supervision, it might not be the first thing they think about because there's marketing, there's setting up their business, there's trying to find their clients.

There's just thinking about their first client. There's all these things that come up.

But realistically, the first point should be a supervisor.

A supervisor and where you're going to go if you have a legal question.

And a supervisor can often not help necessarily with the legal side, but with the code of ethics and understanding different dilemmas or your scope when you're first starting.

So even before someone gets their first client, or is preparing for their first client, I think they should get a supervisor, whether it's individual or group. Individual's really good because it can support you in just thinking about what you want.

I found that with individual supervision, I had to be a lot more prepared.

So I had to really think about what I was going to take to supervision to get the best out of it. I was going to lead it more.

It was going to be reflective of what my needs were, whether it was my intake forms or my scope. So it might not count, it might not be what PACFA requirements are saying in terms of your work, but going to your supervisor with your intake forms is huge.

That gives you the benefit of having someone else go, "Hey, have you considered your type of clients and how you're going to explain the limits of confidentiality as your client base changes?"

If you're going from individuals to couples or a mum with their child, or anyone with someone else in that room, and you've been using tools just for one person.

Sorry, you've been having sessions with just an individual and you're going to more than one person. Your intake form will probably need to change.

So you can take that to supervision and have that discussion.

So I'm probably hugging this because I love it so much, but supervision is, it is something that is for the whole period.

We have a requirement at PACFA of you need to do a minimum of 10, unless your client hours are above 400 hours, then it's 15.

Our clinic, our certified supervisors need to do 15 hours of supervision, so it might change. But realistically, if you think about your client load, you might have one client who you need three sessions in two weeks or three weeks, and that's what it is. You're not then going to not do three sessions later on.

So you might set them up as monthly, but you might actually have that capacity and go, "Okay, I actually need more for this client base, and so I'm going to do 15 this year just because that's what I need."

Or, "I'm going to do a mix of individual and group because I'm going to get different things from both."

The other part is, sorry, just two more things. One is that to upgrade to clinical, if people are thinking about it, because I've seen some questions in the chat and people have been talking about it in different spaces.

To upgrade, you need to have half as individual and half, you can have half as group, but half as individual. So what I've found in my contact with members is that people might start off with group, get a real sense of what's being brought to supervision, and then also find their own individual so that they've got that one-on-one support.

And that can be really helpful to do both of those things.

Katinka, is there anything you would add around that early stage of supervision and how people can really make the most of it?

Yes. I think one of the important things is for supervisees to understand that supervision is not just about reporting what happened in a session.

Supervision is really about reflection.

It's about being curious about yourself, about your client, about the therapeutic relationship, about what's happening in the room.

And sometimes new counselors can feel quite anxious that they have to present perfectly or that they should already know everything.

But actually supervision is the place where you don't have to know everything.

It's the place where you can bring uncertainty and confusion and questions and mistakes and difficult feelings.

And a good supervisor should create an environment where that's safe to do.

I also think one of the really important things is for supervisees to take some responsibility for their supervision.

So thinking beforehand about what they want to bring, what they need help with, what they want to reflect on.

Because the more intentional you are with supervision, the more you will get out of it.

And I think over time, supervision really helps develop your professional identity.

It helps you understand what sort of counselor you are, what approaches fit for you, what your strengths are, what your blind spots are.

And I think that's one of the really beautiful things about supervision across a career.

Absolutely.

Melissa, I know you've worked a lot with trauma practitioners and people working in quite emotionally demanding spaces.

What are some of the signs that people might need more support or might need to pay more attention to self-care and supervision?

I think one of the big signs is when people start losing their sense of capacity or connection.

So they might start feeling exhausted all the time, or they may feel emotionally numb, or they may start dreading particular clients or particular sessions.

Sometimes people become irritable or they notice they're less patient, or they stop doing the things outside of work that normally help them feel grounded.

And I think one of the important things is that burnout and compassion fatigue don't usually happen overnight.

They're usually cumulative.

It's often lots of little moments over time.

And that's where supervision becomes really important because often a supervisor can notice changes before we fully notice them ourselves.

I also think people sometimes underestimate the importance of ordinary human things.

Sleep, relationships, movement, rest, play, creativity, connection, all of those things matter enormously.

And particularly in trauma work, if your whole world becomes about other people's pain, eventually you lose connection with yourself.

So sustainable practice really involves protecting your own humanity as well.

That's such an important point.

And I think one of the things that's come through really strongly across all of today's sessions is that counselling is deeply relational work.

And because it's relational work, the person of the practitioner matters.

Sophie, are there any common misconceptions that you see from PACFA members around supervision?

I think one of the biggest misconceptions is that supervision is only there if something goes wrong.

And actually supervision should be a really regular reflective practice.

It's not just crisis management.

It's not just, "Oh no, something difficult happened and now I need supervision."

It should be part of your ongoing professional development and support.

I also think some people initially think supervision is about being assessed or judged.

And good supervision really shouldn't feel punitive.

It should feel collaborative and reflective and supportive while still maintaining accountability and ethics.

And I think the other thing is people sometimes underestimate how important it is.

You don't necessarily need to stay with the very first supervisor you ever meet if the relationship isn't working for you.

The supervisory relationship matters a lot. And different supervisors might fit different stages of your career or different areas of practice as well.

That's really valuable.

And I think for a lot of people, particularly students and newer practitioners,

there can sometimes be anxiety about bringing difficult feelings or mistakes into supervision.

Katinka, what would you say to that?

I would say that if you can't bring difficult feelings or mistakes into supervision, then it's probably not safe supervision.

Because supervision should be the place where you can honestly reflect on your work.

And we all make mistakes. We all have reactions. We all have uncertainty.

That's part of being human and part of being a relational practitioner. So I think one of the really important things is developing the capacity for self-reflection without shame.

And that's not always easy because many counselors are very caring people who want to do a good job.

But supervision should support learning and growth, not perfectionism.

And often the moments that feel the most uncomfortable initially can actually become some of the richest learning experiences over time.

That's fantastic.

And I think probably a really beautiful note to finish on.

Thank you so much, Katinka, Melissa, and Sophie for sharing your insights and experience with us today.

And thank you everyone for your thoughtful questions and engagement throughout this session.

We are now heading into our final session for today, which is our live Q&A panel.

Thank you so much to everybody who has joined us throughout the conference and contributed questions and reflections in the chat.

We've covered a really broad range of topics today, from building sustainable careers, to private practice, supervision, ethics, insurance, and professional identity.

And what has really stood out across all of the sessions is how relational this profession is.

That counseling isn't just a set of techniques or interventions.

It is deeply connected to who we are as people, how we care for ourselves, how we build relationships, and how we continue learning across a lifetime of practice.

So thank you to all of our speakers today for sharing their expertise and experience so generously.

And thank you to everyone attending, whether you're a student, a new graduate, someone transitioning careers, or already established in practice.

We're really pleased you could be here with us today.

Now, we already have a number of questions that have come through, so we're going to move into those shortly.

But before we do that, I might just invite our panelists to briefly introduce themselves again and perhaps share one piece of advice they wish they'd received earlier in their counseling careers.

Katinka, can we start with you?

Sure.

I think one of the things I wish I had understood earlier is that you don't need to know everything.

I think when you're a new counselor, you can feel enormous pressure to get it right all the time and to have the perfect intervention or response.

But actually, so much of counseling is about being present and relational and reflective.

And I think supervision really helps with that over time because you begin to trust yourself more and trust the process more.

Melissa?

I think I would say don't underestimate the impact the work will have on you as a person.

Not in a negative way necessarily, but this work changes you.

You sit with people in very vulnerable moments and you absorb a lot emotionally and relationally.

And so I think learning earlier how important self-care and boundaries and relationships are would have been really valuable.

And also understanding that you don't have to carry everything alone.

Sophie?

I think probably that there isn't one perfect path.

I think particularly when people are students or newer practitioners, they often feel pressure to know exactly what kind of counselor they're going to be or exactly what their career is going to look like.

And actually most people evolve over time.

People move across different sectors and client groups and ways of working.

So I think staying open and curious and reflective is really important.

That's lovely advice.

Thank you.

And I think that's actually one of the themes that's really come through all day, that counseling careers are rarely linear.

People build them over time and often in very creative and unexpected ways.

So we've had a number of questions come through around confidence.

And I think this is probably something that almost every new practitioner experiences at some point.

How do you know when you're "ready" to start practicing?

Katinka?

I don't think anyone ever feels completely ready.

And I actually think that's okay.

Because part of ethical practice is recognizing that there is always more to learn.

What matters is that you have appropriate training, appropriate supervision, appropriate support, and that you're practicing within your scope.

Confidence grows through experience and reflection and support over time.

It doesn't suddenly appear one day before you see your first client.

Melissa?

I agree completely.

And I think sometimes people confuse anxiety with incompetence.

It's actually very normal to feel nervous when you're beginning relational work with real people.

That doesn't mean you're incapable.

It means you care.

And I think the important thing is staying connected to supervision and reflection and not isolating yourself with those fears.

Because almost everybody has them.

Sophie?

And I think too, one of the things that can really help is remembering that clients don't need you to be perfect.

They need you to be present and ethical and engaged and safe.

And that develops over time.

That's such an important reminder.

We also have a question here around balancing private practice with other forms of employment.

And I know we've actually heard quite a lot about that throughout today.

Melissa, do you want to start with that one?

Yeah. I actually think for many people, having a combination of roles can be really healthy.

It can reduce isolation, it can reduce financial pressure initially, and it can also give you diversity in your work.

So I don't think people should feel pressure to immediately move into full-time private practice if that doesn't suit them.

A lot of people gradually build private practice alongside other work, and that's completely valid.

Katinka?

And I think diversity can actually support longevity.

Doing slightly different types of work or working in different environments can help sustain interest and energy over time.

It can also help broaden your skills and experience.

So there are many ways to structure a counseling career.

Absolutely.

And Sophie, from a PACFA perspective, do you see a lot of practitioners combining different types of work?

Yes, definitely.

It's very common.

We have members working across private practice, EAPs, schools, community organizations, supervision, training, corporate work, all sorts of different combinations.

And I think that's one of the strengths of counseling as a profession, that there are so many different ways to apply these skills.

Great.

We also have a question here around what people should look for in their first job or first placement experience.

Katinka?

I think safety and support are really important. So looking for environments where there is good supervision, where there are people you can ask questions of, where learning is encouraged.

Because early experiences can really shape confidence and professional identity. And I think it's okay if your first role isn't your forever role.

Sometimes early roles are places where you learn foundational skills and discover what does and doesn't suit you.

Melissa?

And I think paying attention to the culture of workplaces matters a lot. How do people speak to each other?

How is support handled?

How are mistakes handled?

How do people respond when someone is struggling?

All of those things tell you a lot about whether an environment is likely to be sustainable for you.

That's really valuable.

And I think probably a really fitting note for us to finish on today.

Thank you again to all of our speakers and panelists throughout the conference.

And thank you to everybody who joined us, contributed questions, and spent the day with us.

We hope today's discussions have helped you feel more informed, more connected, and more supported as you continue your counseling journey.

Thank you everyone, and enjoy the rest of your afternoon.