

Using Talking Mats to provide a reflective thinking space within clinical supervision.

“At its simplest, supervision is a professional relationship and activity which ensures good standards of practice and encourages development”

COT 2015 ³

Characteristics of a healthy supervisory relationship are:

Trust, honesty, listening, empathy, acceptance and respect

Cassedy 2010 ⁷

Clinical supervision

The process of clinical supervision is embedded in clinical practice; however, clinicians report the process lacks clarity, and at times can be unproductive.¹

This resource will explore how Talking Mats can improve the quality of supervision by creating a reflective thinking space.

Howatson-Jones states “Clinical supervision is a designated reflective exchange between two or more professionals in a safe and supportive environment which critically analyses practice through normative, formative and restorative means to promote and enhance the quality of care.” ²

Sweeney et al, looked at the process of supervision within occupational therapy practice from the perspective of both the supervisor and supervisee. They identified that supervisors seemed to place an over-emphasis on support and development, at the expense of evaluative feedback and direction. Research also demonstrates, that supervisees report that they are dissatisfied with the quality of “restorative” emotional support provided to them. They identified that they want to be able to explore it, deal with it, and learn how to cope with it.^{4,5,6}

Talking Mats

Talking Mats has been demonstrated as being a helpful tool in enabling people to organise their thoughts and express a view.

A Talking Mat creates a space in which to think. This provides focus and helps to limit other distractions. The use of a visual scale and the topic card sets, gives structure to the thinking process and is therefore energy efficient.

Clinicians who have used Talking Mats within the supervision process have said:

- *“It lends itself to a safe and supportive conversation.”*
- *“It made me think of things in a different way, and it encouraged me to explore why I was feeling a specific way and look at things with a different perspective.”*

“I verbalised more in the session [with the Talking Mat] than I have in other supervision sessions put together – because of the prompts it gives and that it raises topics instead of having to think of them.”

“It lends itself to a safe and supportive conversation”

Occupational Therapists

Reflective Practice

In 2015, the Royal College of Occupational Therapy, in response to the supervision research findings, produced guidelines³ aimed at providing clarity about the purpose and practice of clinical supervision. Within the guidance, they state that reflective practice, goes hand in hand with supervision.

Reflective practice is defined as **“taking time and conserving the energy to think critically about your practice. It means stepping outside the action in order to see how to improve what takes place.”**⁸

➤ Taking time

Prioritising reflective time within a busy working day is a challenge. It is often easier in the short term to just “keep on going.” Perhaps we have a perception that other things are more important, or we know that if we stop and reflect we may have to think about things we find difficult.

It is important to challenge this mind set and commit to finding a way to enable high quality reflective practice within a safe supervisory relationship. Not only will this benefit us, but it will ultimately benefit the people to whom we provide services and care.

➤ Conserving the energy to think

Thinking is effortful; it requires emotional and internal energy to think and reflect on our practice.⁸

Using a Talking Mat enables a person to focus their attention onto a specific topic. The supervisee is the “thinker”, with the supervisor being the “listener” within the process. The thinker is given the opportunity to widely explore a specific topic, to reflect on what they think and feel about each component and to freely express their opinion.

➤ Stepping outside the action

The visual representation of the thinking process on the Talking Mat can provide a focus for further reflection, discussion and decision making. The card sets help to widen the conversation, enabling the thinker to consider all elements of a chosen topic.

A series of Talking Mats, used over time can help to demonstrate meaningful change.

Talking Mats have two card sets which clinicians have found useful to create a reflective space within the supervision process. Below are some examples of how Talking Mats have been used.

Coping

“My supervision session [using the Talking Mat] felt unthreatening which was really refreshing. It felt like nothing was loaded with preconceived ideas”

“It made me think of things in a different way, and it encouraged me to explore why I was feeling a specific way and look at things with a different perspective”

Occupational Therapists



This set can be used to think and reflect on coping skills within the workplace.

Here the top scale going well

In this example, the thinker identified that they were able to adapt well to the changing work environment and enjoyed working with their team. They recognised that they had been lacking in energy recently. This led to them thinking about issues of resilience and how they managed stressful events at work. They reflected on their need to manage their time in a different way and not put off difficult tasks until the end of the day.

Learning and Thinking



Learning and Thinking card set provides a reflective tool to enable people to think about all the components involved in learning and thinking.

The top scale used here was going well/not going well however the top scale of confident/not confident would also work well.

Thinkers who are new to a job role or students often gain benefit from using this card set.

For more information:

*Take a look at the
Talking Mats website:*

www.talkingmats.com

*The blogs have lots of
great examples of how
Talking Mats are being
used.*

*Try the digital Talking
Mats Taster App for
free.*

*Follow on Twitter or
Facebook*

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