NATIONAL ADULT PROTECTIVE SERVICES ASSOCIATION
THE NATIONAL APS RESOURCE CENTER

Technical Assistance Brief

Fundamentals of APS Supervision

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The National Adult Protective Services Resource Center (NAPSRC) provides monthly Technical Assistance (TA) calls on subjects requested by the field. Our team of adult protective services (APS) experts provides this national TA to state APS administrators. This brief summarizes the information provided during the May 2015 call.

Purpose

This brief addresses the basic aspects of APS supervision, whether at the local, regional or state level. State APS administrators are encouraged to share this information with the APS supervisors in their states. Although the role of the APS supervisor is primary in assuring the safety and well-being of vulnerable victims, APS supervisors often come to their positions with little or no training on effective supervision. The subject is seldom, if ever, taught in college or graduate school. In many cases, supervisors assume the role without a clear understanding of the wide range of responsibilities involved. There are four essential roles that make up effective APS Supervision: Administration, Education, Management, and Support. An effective APS supervisor must be able to perform multiple tasks in each domain while at the same time being aware of the over-all direction of the program, the individual needs of each supervisee, as well as the status of every victim served.

The APS Supervisor as Administrator

Typically, APS programs are located administratively within Departments of either Human Services (DHS) or Aging Services. Neither location provides an ideal fit. In large umbrella departments of Human or Social Services, APS can be lost and not get the attention or resources it needs. The focus of Aging Services is providing support services to the elderly, and traditionally has not included either adults with disabilities under the age of 60 or older victims of abuse. As a result, APS administrators and supervisors need to be continually educating and informing their superiors about the special characteristics of the clients they serve, the legal mandates governing the program, and how APS fits into the agency's overall goals and objectives. In addition, they need to raise awareness about the impact of changing demographics in their region, and how this will affect resource allocation.

While data collection and analysis are seldom emphasized in social services curricula, these skills are essential for APS administrators, who need to monitor the accuracy and usefulness of data being collected in order to accurately forecast the changing needs of the program. Understanding the budgeting process includes knowing the funding streams and advocating for increased

About the National Adult Protective Services Resource Center (NAPSRC)

The National Adult Protective Services Resource Center (NAPSRC) is a project (No. 90ER0003) of the Administration for Community Living, U.S. Administration on Aging, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), administered by the National Adult Protective Services Association (NAPSA). Grantees carrying out projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their findings and conclusions. Therefore, points of view or opinions do not necessarily represent official Administration on Aging or DHHS policy.

allocations, as well as actively seeking out new partnerships for grant applications. In addition, given the nature of bureaucracies, APS administrators function as change agents, assisting, supporting and advocating for staff during stressful periods of agency restructuring.

Providing program oversight is an essential role for APS supervisors. This means conducting careful audits of APS case files, as well as shadowing workers in the field in order to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. Good supervision involves critical thinking during the case record review process, identifying which topics the worker focuses on as well as which ones are avoided. A good supervisor also models time management skills, demonstrating to staff the ability to prioritize and efficiently perform tasks in spite of ever increasing caseloads. Finally, the APS supervisor acts as a buffer between management and staff, interpreting administrative directives and advocating for staff needs.

The APS Supervisor as Educator

An APS supervisor is always teaching, whether it is in a formal classroom, or simply when identifying a "teaching moment" in the course of a conversation. In terms of adult learning, consider the following:

- Realize that adults come to the learning experience with a wealth of knowledge and life experience.
- Start by acknowledging what workers know and can do.
- Encourage workers to share their knowledge and experience with others.

The most effective learning environment includes a variety of experiences. In order to respond to workers' different learning styles, as well as to hold their attention, use a variety of training approaches including:

- Case Studies
- Written Information
- Role Play
- Critical Incidents
- Shadowing
- Videos Brainstorming
- Group Discussion
- Games

There are many APS training resources available through NAPSA and the NAPSRC. They include the 23 Core Competencies for Adult Protective Services which have been field tested (available here). APS administrators and supervisors are encouraged to use them; all the materials can be downloaded for free. Since training is an ongoing process, these modules may be repeated as needed. There are also numerous informational webinars available through NAPSA. In addition to formal training, workers learn through behavior modeled by the supervisor, during case discussions, and through the supervisor's observations resulting from home visits.

Since adults process new information in different ways, start by evaluating which are the most effective training modalities for each worker's learning style. Keep in mind that some teaching methods have been shown to be more effective than others:

Type of Learning	*Average Rate of Retention*
Lecture	5%
Reading	10%
Audiovisual	20%
Demonstration	30%
Discussion Group	50%
Practice by Doing	75%
Teach Someone Else	80%

Adapted from Malcolm Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: Andragogy vs. Pedagogy*, New York: Association Press 1970

The Texas Department of Family and Human Services developed a tool: WORKER INTERVIEWING SKILLS EVALUATION (WISE) to evaluate a new worker's interviewing and investigation skills. The tool relies on direct observation and is completed after a new worker is shadowed in the field by the supervisor.

Alternately, the tool can be completed as a self-assessment by the new worker or by a lead worker/mentor who is trained to carry out shadowing activities. The 9-item scale evaluates body language, interviewing techniques, and investigative skills. The rating scale is based on a 1-5 rating and in which 5 indicates exceptional performance overall, 3 identifies adequate performance and 1 stands for unacceptable. This tool may also be used periodically to measure a worker's skill development over time and to identify areas in which more training is called for. The tool is available here.

The APS Supervisor as Manager

The managerial role of the APS supervisor involves multiple activities that often take up more than 40% of the job. Case assignment is an essential component. In a small unit, assigning who should get the next case can be as simple as using a rotation schedule. But in a unit with more than four workers, the supervisor may use some discretion in assigning cases based not only on staff availability, but also the specific skills and experience level of each caseworker as well as geographic considerations. In some more challenging cases the supervisor may assign two workers in order to share the burden as well as to provide mutual support.

The case conference is the core of APS practice. Supervisors should conduct these frequently and regularly. Ideally, the conference should be a protected time during which interruptions are not permitted. Pay attention to the worker who claims that "Everything is fine," or who tries to hurry through the process. Be clear about expectations and firm when holding the worker accountable. Be aware that some cases may expose the worker to dangerous situations, and help the worker evaluate potential risks and develop a safety plan. "Worker Safety for the APS Supervisor" is a helpful webinar offered by NAPSRC (available here).

Conducting worker performance reviews is not most supervisors' favorite task. However, it is essential in assuring worker accountability and client safety. Field observation is an essential part of the worker evaluation process. The review begins with setting clear, attainable goals; then monitoring progress; identifying problems early; setting expectations for change; enforcing a plan of correction and rewarding progress. Accurate documentation is essential every step of the way. Encourage the worker to periodically evaluate him/herself. An effective performance review should build on mutually identified goals that are being tracked over time. In problem situations when the worker's performance is not acceptable, it is important for the supervisor to ask for assistance from his/her supervisor and Human Resources. Keep in mind that the supervisor is not the worker's friend, parent or therapist, although aspects of all of those roles come into play.

Leadership is an ongoing managerial role. It requires a broad, holistic assessment of every level of APS including the clients, workers, agency, and the community. It requires forward thinking, creativity, flexibility and a positive approach to problem solving. Good leadership brings people together to achieve a common goal.

Supportive Supervision

Supportive supervision is the bedrock of every supervisory role. A strengths-based, growth enhancing approach makes the best use of workers' existing skills and challenges them to stretch their abilities. The supervisor should provide staff with opportunities to try new approaches, and reward innovation.

- The first and most highly valued quality in a good supervisor is honesty. It includes the ability to continually evaluate one's self frankly, admitting mistakes and taking responsibility for them, as well as being straightforward and direct with others. Honesty builds trust, the essential basis of any successful relationship.

- *Empathy*, the ability to understand another's situation and feelings, is also important, as it takes the harshness out of confrontation. Understanding how another person feels goes a long way towards explaining their actions, and becomes a tool in helping them to change unproductive behavior.
- A good supervisor relies on a strong sense of self when handling conflict, and is able to set clear expectations and boundaries. Goals are tied to established expectations and are measured through observable, verifiable information. Honesty includes self-knowledge.
- And finally, a good supervisor is *comfortable in the leadership role*, is able to see the *big picture*, works *collaboratively* and has the *strength* and *courage* to stand up for what is right, *advocating* for clients, workers and the APS program.

Types of Supervision

There are a number of methods used by APS supervisors. They include classical clinical supervision, a form which has been written about by Holly Ramsey-Klawsnik, PhD. NAPSRC has provided a TA call by Dr. Ramsey-Klawsnik Clinical Issues in Supervising APS Practice and the brief summarizing this information is forthcoming. In addition, a supervisor may assign a new APS worker to shadow one who is experienced, in order to learn by observation. For some difficult cases, two workers may be assigned to work as a dyad. This approach is especially helpful when workers must confront hostile alleged perpetrators and/or resistant clients. Using a social work version of the "good cop/bad cop" dynamic can be effective in these situations. The dyad also allows workers to share their experience and provide mutual support. Group supervision can be a way to bring members of a team together as they share their struggles with specific cases. It can be a way to learn from each other, and to derive strength and support from their peers.

Values can be challenged by the group as a whole, which may help some of the "old timers" become less apathetic and resistant to change. The team approach calls for strong leadership by the supervisor, who needs to set clear boundaries and be comfortable with conflict. The supervisor needs to create a climate of mutual respect and trust within the group. Group supervision should be kept separate from administrative staff meetings devoted to imparting information on agency policies and procedures. Community review teams, or multidisciplinary teams, are a variation on group supervision, in which diverse agency representatives share their challenges in dealing with difficult clients who are draining multiple agencies with their many service needs. These multidisciplinary teams often result in greater collaboration and cooperation between agencies, as they help to clarify roles and resource limitations. Such collaboration can, in turn, lead to joint grant applications, better training and community outreach, and ultimately, more resources for clients. And finally, the most important type of supervision, is the "teaching moment"; that unplanned, unscripted conversation between supervisor and worker which occurs at random. In this situation, the supervisors picks-up on and expands upon the worker's comments, providing a new insight or interpretation that may significantly change the worker's practice. The supervisor should provide staff with opportunities to try new approaches, and reward innovation.

Team Building

Team building is an ongoing process, as each group evolves and changes over time. As new members join the group and others leave, the leader will need to review the purpose and rules of the group, to welcome new participants and insure that those who leave are recognized for their contributions. Ground rules pertaining to confidentiality and members' participation should be clear, but few in number. As people become more comfortable in a group, power conflicts and personality differences may emerge. A skilled leader helps to maintain the balance of the group, making sure that bullying is not tolerated, and that negative attention seeking is not reinforced. Clarification and increased trust, not blame or shame, should always be the goals of the group. Speaking of the team members as "we" reinforces mutuality. Members should be supportive of

each other, recognizing the difficulty of the work, honoring each other's efforts, and speaking respectfully of the clients. There should be frequent rewards in the form of praise, recognition, celebrations, and awards—and, of course, food.

DEVELOPING COLLABORATON

- Reach out to other agencies serving APS clients
- Identify examples of clients who require services from multiple agencies
- Point out duplication of services being provided
- Explain benefits of collaboration
- Develop inter agency protocols Identify gaps in services
- Work collaboratively to fill gaps Maintain open communication

The Supervisor's Role in Collaboration and Resource Development

The Supervisor is often the public face of APS. He/she acts as a role model in working collaboratively with representatives of other agencies and the community as a whole. This collaboration results in a better understanding of, and support for, both the APS program and the clients who are served. The development of written protocols between agencies, either in the context of a multidisciplinary team or directly between two agencies, expedites the sharing of client information, improves the appropriateness of referrals, reduces duplication and identifies gaps in services. Once identified, these gaps may be addressed by a consortium of community agencies through changes to internal procedures as well as joint grant applications and resource sharing.

Characteristics of a Positive Work Environment

Where people work has a profound influence on how they work. In a positive work environment, work gets done and it is done well. The basis of such an environment is trust—in each other, in the supervisor and in the agency as a whole. Performance expectations are high, and good work is rewarded with free flowing recognition and praise. Staff who take responsibility receive credit for their accomplishments. Communication is open and supportive, and a high value is placed on collaboration. Feedback is frequent, and may include constructive criticism. The work space, while not elaborate, is clean, safe and comfortable. Respect is shown for staffs' personal space as well as for their time. People have pride of ownership. When things are not going well, there is emotional support along with a strong sense of "We are in this together and we can get through it." In good times there are smiles and celebrations. A good APS Supervisor is the force behind a positive work environment.

About the Author

Joanne Otto, MSW, was the first Executive Director of NAPSA and is the retired APS Administrator of the Colorado APS Program. Joanne is a national expert in elder and vulnerable adult abuse, particularly in providing and improving APS services, who currently consults.

RESOURCES

APS Supervisor Core Competency Training, The Academy of Professional Excellence, San Diego State University School of Social Work. Available at: Theacademy.sdsu.edu/master/supervisor-training

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