

Practice Supervision Guidance

Practice supervision is a cornerstone of professional social work practice that supports ongoing professional learning, reflective practice, ethical decision-making, and the development of competent practitioners across diverse practice contexts. Through a structured and relational process, supervision helps social workers develop confidence, refine practice approaches, and prepare for increased responsibility or independent practice (Bogo, 2022).

Supervision also plays a critical role in decision-making that meets ethical and practice standards by allowing supervisees to explore dilemmas, assess risks, clarify boundaries, and apply ethical frameworks with the support of a more experienced practitioner. Supervisors help ensure decisions prioritize client safety, uphold regulatory and professional obligations, and reflect sound professional judgment (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW] 2005).

While the terms *practice supervision* and *clinical supervision* are used interchangeably in ACSW's Standards of Practice, this guideline uses *practice supervision* to refer to this distinct professional activity.

Purpose

The purpose of this practice guideline is to complement the [ACSW Standards of Practice](#) and [CASW Code of Ethics \(2025\)](#), and to provide clear, evidence informed guidance for practice supervision of social workers in Alberta across all practice settings.

This guidance helps social workers, supervisors, educators, and organizations understand supervision as both a developmental and accountable professional relationship. It promotes competence, upholds ethics and professional standards and protects the public. This encourages supervisors to provide—and ensures supervisees receive—the support, evaluation and direction necessary for competent service provision.

Providing practice supervision is a distinct and advanced area of practice. Reading or applying this guidance alone does not establish competence to provide supervision.

This guidance is intended to support understanding of key elements and expectations of professional social work practice supervision. It is not a training manual, competency framework, or step-by-step guide to becoming a supervisor, nor is it guidance on managing or supervising staff from an administrative or operational perspective. While a single individual may at times hold both practice supervision and administrative management roles, these functions are distinct and must be approached with clarity about purpose, authority, and accountability.

Understanding Supervision: definitions

Supervision is one example of professional support in the practice of social work. Not all professional support involves authority over practice.

Practice supervision is distinguished by its focus on accountability for professional social work practice and the authority to evaluate, direct, and oversee professional decisions and service delivery. Other forms of professional support such as consultation, mentoring, or coaching may be valuable but do not carry authority or accountability for practice.

Practice supervision

- Includes clinical supervision
- Does not include administrative supervision

Administrative supervision, by contrast, typically involves authority and accountability for a social worker's overall performance, employment responsibilities, and organizational requirements, and may or may not include practice supervision. In some contexts, administrative supervisors may delegate practice supervision to another qualified professional while retaining accountability for overall performance; in others, a single individual may hold both roles simultaneously. Regardless of how these roles are structured, clarifying their distinct purposes, authority, and accountability helps ensure that social workers, supervisors, organizations, and the public understand what type of support is being provided and under what responsibility. This clarity helps prevent practice supervision from being confused with other forms of professional support that do not involve authority over practice. To distinguish between these activities, the following descriptions are provided, with additional detail in [Appendix B](#).

Practice Supervision

ACSW Standard of Practice A(y) defines supervision as the professional relationship between a supervisor and a supervisee that includes evaluation and direction over the services provided and promotes the continued development of the supervisee's knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide services in an ethical and competent manner. Where supervision is limited to overseeing organizational requirements and compliance with policies it does not fulfill the requirements for practice supervision under the Standards of Practice.

Not all professional support involves authority over practice. Practice supervision is distinguished by its focus on accountability for professional social work practice and the authority associated with that responsibility. Other forms of support—such as consultation, mentoring, or coaching, may be valuable but do not carry the same authority. These roles may be separate or combined in practice, but clarity about their purpose and authority is essential to prevent misunderstanding and to support ethical and transparent supervision relationships.

To distinguish between these activities, the following descriptions are provided, and additional information is provided in [Appendix B](#).

Administrative Supervision

Administrative supervision focuses on the organizational, managerial, and accountability aspects of a social worker’s role. It is typically concerned with agency policies, workload management, performance expectations, and service delivery requirements. It often includes oversight of job performance, ensuring compliance with organizational procedures, and resource allocation.

When supervision is limited to overseeing organizational requirements and compliance with policies, it does not fulfill practice supervision requirements under the ACSW Standards of Practice.

Administrative supervisors may hold positions of authority (like being a manager or evaluator.) This can create dual-role dynamics that need to be addressed when a supervisory relationship also exists.

Mentorship

Mentoring is a supportive, relationship-based process that focuses on the mentee’s overall professional growth, long-term development, and career progression. It typically involves a more experienced social worker offering guidance, wisdom and perspective, drawing on their broader professional journey.

The mentoring relationship is collaborative and nonevaluative. The mentor does not hold authority over the mentee’s practice, is not accountable for the mentee’s service delivery, and does not provide formal oversight. Instead, mentorship emphasizes:

- exploring career goals
- navigating professional identity
- expanding networks and opportunities
- developing confidence and leadership capacity

Consultation

The ACSW Standard of Practice 1(f) defines consultation as a problem-solving process in which professional expertise is offered to an individual, group, organization or community. In a professional practice context, consultation is a process that occurs between two or more professionals, where one is seeking help, insight, or assistance regarding a particular matter or problem. The focus is narrow and specific, and advice or guidance provided may or may not be put into action (ACSW, 2023).

Coaching

Coaching is a structured, time limited, and goal-oriented process focused on developing specific skills, competencies, or performance outcomes. It is typically driven by clearly defined objectives that the coach and coachee establish together.

Coaching emphasizes:

- targeted skill-building
- performance enhancement
- measurable goals
- short-term, focused learning cycles

The coach helps the coachee refine techniques, build confidence, and improve performance in particular tasks or roles. Unlike supervision, coaching does not include evaluative authority, regulatory accountability, or responsibility for the coachee's professional decisions.

Coaching can support or complement supervision, but it does not replace the oversight, direction and accountability required within a supervisory relationship. (Falender & Shafranske, 2004, 2017).

See Appendix B: Differentiating Professional Support Roles for more details on the distinctions between these roles.

Principles of Supervision

These concepts are designed to provide a shared understanding of supervisory relationships and guide how supervision is planned, delivered and documented.

In the context of supervision, a principle refers to a fundamental guiding belief or foundational concept that shapes how supervision is understood, designed and practiced. These are not procedures or rules. They are the ideas that guide policies, expectations and behaviours within supervisory relationships. (ACSW, 2023).

Accountability	Supervision is an accountable professional relationship in which the supervisor holds responsibility for oversight, evaluation, and ensuring ethical, competent, and safe practice.
Competence & Scope Alignment	Supervision ensures that a supervisee's work aligns with their knowledge, skills, abilities, and scope of practice. Assignments and responsibilities must match demonstrated competence.
Safe, Ethical & Standards-Aligned Practice	Supervision safeguards the public by ensuring that day-to-day practice meets the Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, and legislative and organizational requirements.
Clear Roles, Expectations	Supervision requires explicit understanding about the purpose of supervision, authority, expectations and responsibilities. It requires

& Boundaries	clarity about the difference between practice supervision, administrative oversight, consultation, mentoring, and coaching.
Monitoring, Evaluation & Feedback	Supervision includes ongoing monitoring of practice quality, structured evaluations, and meaningful, timely feedback to support safe service delivery and progressive skill development.
Reflective, Culturally Responsive & Supportive Practice	Supervision fosters reflective learning, considers individual supervisor and supervisee factors, context, and power dynamics. Supervision supports cultural humility and anti-oppressive practice, and promotes a safe environment for disclosure, growth, and professional development. Diversity in supervision relationships are endless and require careful attention, however, the basic principles of supervision should guide all interactions

Who Can Provide Supervision?

Providing supervision is not simply an extension of practice expertise, it is a distinct and advanced area of social work practice (Falender & Shafranske, 2019; Davys and Beddoe, 2020). Competence to provide supervision cannot be determined by credential or years of registration alone. Supervisors should be experienced professionals who have demonstrated competence in their own practice, have received training and have experience in supervision models, leadership and mentorship.

Where supervision is provided by a social worker, please review the registration, education and experiential recommendations in the table below. Refer to when supervision is required to identify when practice supervision must be provided by a registered social worker.

In circumstances where supervision is appropriately provided by another professional, they should possess the requisite practice expertise, supervision competence, and authority to assume responsibility and accountability for the supervisee’s professional social work practice. In all cases, supervision arrangements must be clearly defined, appropriate to the practice context, and consistent with applicable standards, legislation, and organizational requirements.

Registered Social Workers who Supervise should:

Registration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have active registration on the ACSW general registry with no conditions on their practice permit. • Have active registration on the ACSW e-practice or general registry if they reside in another province and provide supervision virtually, and be complying with all registration requirements, cannot have any conditions on their practice permit in any other jurisdiction where they are regulated. • If applicable, hold any requisite practice enhancement required to provide the specific type of supervision (such as authorization to perform the restricted activity of psychosocial intervention).
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have academic credentials equivalent to or exceeding those of the supervisee.
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to demonstrate competence across the supervisory domains outlined in this guidance.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be able to demonstrate they are experienced in the practice they are supervised. This is typically defined as having five or more years of successful experience in the practice area (Bogo, 2015) • Have engaged in formal education or structured professional learning related to supervision prior to assuming the supervisory role. Educational preparation should address topics such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ supervision models and approaches ○ ethics and boundaries in supervision ○ providing feedback and evaluating competence ○ documentation and accountability in supervision ○ managing power dynamics and dual roles ○ supporting reflective practice and professional development.
Continuing Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in an ongoing supervision and/or consultation group • Identify ongoing professional development in this practice area in their annual learning plan

Before entering a supervisory relationship, both supervisors and supervisees share responsibility for assessing their readiness, capacity and areas for development. To support this, a summary of key supervision competencies and indicators is provided in [Appendix C](#). These competencies outline the knowledge, skills, ethical responsibilities, and relational qualities required to guide, evaluate, and support social workers in practice.

The Practice of Supervision

Supervision Models or Frameworks

A practice model or framework provides a structured way of understanding and guiding how supervision is carried out in a particular context. It brings together shared principles, assumptions, roles, and approaches that inform supervisory processes, decision making, and accountability. Practice models or frameworks offer guidance rather than prescription, and support consistency and quality while allowing supervision to adapt to the needs of the work, the setting, and the supervisee.

A variety of practice supervision models or frameworks are used in social work, including, but not limited to, developmental, reflective, competency-based, anti-oppressive, strengths-based and integrative approaches. While these models differ in emphasis, they share a common focus on supporting safe and effective practice through structured oversight, professional development, and ethical decision-making. For the purposes of this guidance, supervision may draw on elements from multiple models or frameworks, with an emphasis on clarity of roles, reflective learning, and accountability, rather than adherence to a single formal model or framework. This guidance does not prescribe a particular approach.

When is Supervision Required?

Supervision is required at specific points in a social worker's professional journey, particularly when they are entering the profession, expanding their scope, working in higher-risk areas, or addressing identified gaps in competence. Across these contexts, supervision provides the structured oversight needed to protect the public, uphold professional standards, and support the ongoing development of social workers (ACSW, 2023). Following is a list of situations where supervision is explicitly required in the ACSW Standards of Practice, or ACSW policies.

Practicum Supervision

Supervision requirements are set through accreditation/approval standards and are identified by the student's academic institution.

Social work students in practicum may or may not already be registered social workers depending upon the academic qualification being pursued. Social work students participate in practicum placements that require supervision. The [ACSW Education Approval Standard 7](#), Field Placement, outlines the practicum placement supervision requirements for social work diploma programs. The Canadian Association for Social Work Education (CASWE-ACFTS) is the accreditation body for Bachelor of Social Work and Master of Social Work programs in Canada.

Provisional Registration

The *Social Workers Professional Regulation 4(2)* outlines the required supervised practice hours (1500 hours) for social workers on the provisional registry.

Acquiring Practice Enhancements

Most social work practice including community practice, advocacy, policy, research, and many direct service roles operates fully within the general scope of practice. Practice enhancements are a pathway for those seeking advanced clinical recognition, not a requirement for competent practice.

The following practice enhancements are voluntary designations that recognize advanced competence in clinical social work practice and require supervision:

- independent authorization to perform the restricted activity of psychosocial intervention,
- clinical social work designation, or
- approved clinical supervisor designation.

ACSW Standard E.5(c) requires social workers performing the restricted activity of psychosocial intervention to have supervision if they are not individually authorized.

ACSW clinical program policies and procedures outline who can provide supervision to clinical candidates. (ACSW, 2023; ACSW Clinical Policy, 2026).

Practice Remediation (Health Professions Act 40.1(1))

Supervision may also be used as a structured tool for practice remediation when concerns about competence, judgement, or adherence to standards are identified and do not meet the threshold for a complaint. Concerns may be identified by the social worker themselves, or through ACSW departments such as Registration, Professional Practice or Professional Conduct.

Professional Conduct (Health Professions Act 82(1)(i))

Unprofessional conduct may result in conditions being applied to a social worker's practice permit and often include a supervision requirement.

The Standards of Practice reference supervision both *directly* (where supervision must be provided and documented) and *indirectly* (where competence in specific practice areas requires supervised experience, training or consultation). Details on where ACSW's Standards request or require supervision can be found in [Appendix D](#).

While standards relating to supervision remain unchanged, the College recognizes that access may be limited in rural, specialized, or high-demand settings. In such circumstances, social workers are expected to demonstrate reasonable efforts to secure appropriate supervision, document the attempts they make, and implement alternative safeguards such as:

- structured peer consultation
- external case review
- targeted continuing education
- professional engagement activities reflected in the annual professional development plan
- careful scope-of-practice management
- ACSW Consultation Service

These strategies align with the College's ongoing competence and public protection mandate (Alberta College of Social Workers, 2023). Limitations in access to supervision do not remove the obligation to practice competently and ethically; however, it is understood that that specific circumstances may require adaptive strategies to uphold professional standards and client safety (Bogo, 2015; O'Donoghue & Tsui, 2015).

The Components of Supervision

This section outlines the core components of the supervision process, including how supervision is planned, documented, delivered, and evaluated. It also describes the key responsibilities of supervisors and supervisees, clarifying how oversight, guidance,

decision-making authority, and accountability function within the supervisory relationship (Falender & Shafranske, 2019; Bogo, 2022).

Accountability and Responsibility

In a supervisory relationship, responsibility refers to the active role a supervisor plays in supporting the supervisee's practice. This includes collaboratively setting goals, providing guidance, offering feedback, evaluating performance, and addressing risks or challenges to ensure services are safe, ethical, and competent (Falender & Shafranske, 2019; Davys & Beddoe, 2020; Alberta College of Social Workers, 2023). Accountability, in contrast, is the obligation of the supervisor to be answerable for the supervisee's professional actions within the scope of supervision. Supervisors hold accountability to multiple stakeholders:

- ACSW - Ensuring supervision aligns with the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.
- Clients and the public - Ensuring that supervised practice does not place clients at risk.
- Employing organization – Sharing responsibility for safe, ethical and competent service delivery by documenting supervision, following organizational reporting requirements, and escalating significant practice concerns in accordance with organizational policies or formal supervision agreements.
- Supervisees - Providing appropriate oversight, guidance and feedback and documentation within the agreed scope of supervision.

While accountability establishes a formal duty to uphold professional standards, it does not equate to personal liability for every action of the supervisee. Liability is typically framed by regulatory standards, organizational policies, and the supervisor's adherence to professional, ethical, and documented supervisory practices. Maintaining thorough records, following established supervision protocols, and escalating risks appropriately are key measures that help supervisors balance accountability with risk management while protecting clients and maintaining public trust.

Supervision is a formal professional relationship with responsibilities for both parties. [Appendix E](#) contains questions to support shared reflection and dialogue for the supervisor and supervisee prior to establishing supervision. They assist in clarifying roles, authority, capacity and expectations, and in determining whether supervision can be provided in a manner that is consistent with professional standards.

Supervisory Requirements

This section describes professional expectations and best practices in the provision of supervision. It is intended to clarify supervisory obligations and standards-aligned practices, not to substitute for training or to establish competence to provide supervision.

Developing a Supervision Plan or Contract

The supervisory relationship normally begins by developing a supervision plan or contract. A clear and well-structured supervision plan or contract is essential for establishing expectations, responsibilities, and boundaries within the supervisory relationship.

Developing this plan at the outset ensures that supervision is purposeful, transparent, and grounded in professional and ethical standards. An effective supervision contract clarifies how supervisory responsibilities will be fulfilled and provides a foundation for accountability, safety and reflective learning (Davys and Beddoe, 2020). A written plan also outlines the supervision format, duration, documentation requirements, evaluation processes, and mechanisms for addressing concerns. To support this process, Appendix F provides a detailed list of recommended elements to assist supervisors and supervisees in creating a supervision contract or plan.

The supervision plan is intended to guide and formalize how supervisory responsibilities will be carried out over time. It supports a safe and measured progression from direct to indirect supervision as the supervisee gains competence. The supervisor should review the supervision plan with the supervisee to ensure mutual understanding.

Consent

Supervision often involves observation of client interactions, discussion about the professional services being provided and review of documentation. The following ACSW Standards are relevant to consent in a supervision context:

Standard	Description
B.4(c)	Written informed consent is required from a client before professional services provided to the client are observed by others or electronically recorded for supervision purposes
D.5 (h)	A social worker will inform clients that supervision and professional consultation are part of professional social work practice and that confidential information may be shared as part of the process.

While social workers should be transparent about the role of supervision in professional practice, explicit consent for supervision is not always feasible in every interaction.

The reflective questions in [Appendix F](#) provide practical considerations to support social workers in applying consent requirements when supervision occurs as part of professional practice.

Methods of Supervision

Supervision is a dynamic, developmental process that evolves as supervisees build competence. Supervision is anchored in the expectation that supervisee growth is evaluated against the specific competencies of their practice area, rather than prescribed hours or rigid formats.

Competency-based supervision relies on ongoing observation, feedback, reflective discussion, and the use of clearly defined competency benchmarks to determine readiness for increasing autonomy (Falender & Shafranske, 2004, 2017, 2019).

A developmental approach also emphasizes that supervisors guide learning by aligning supervision activities with the supervisee's stage of professional growth, using reflective dialogue, goal setting, and collaborative monitoring to ensure competence develops safely and intentionally (Davys & Beddoe, 2020).

Early in the supervisory relationship—particularly when the supervisee is new to the profession, new to a setting, or taking on unfamiliar or higher risk responsibilities—the supervisor provides more frequent, structured, and directive oversight. This may include direct observation, regular case reviews, documentation audits, and guidance on ethical decision making, risk assessment, and scope of practice. At this stage, the supervisor's role is both supportive and evaluative, ensuring that foundational competencies are demonstrated consistently and safely.

As the supervisee's competence becomes evident, supervision can transition toward more indirect methods, greater opportunities for self-assessment, and deeper reflective practice. The supervisor's focus shifts to fostering critical thinking, strengthening professional judgement, and preparing the supervisee for increasing levels of independence. This progression reflects both the supervisee's developmental growth and the nature and complexity of their work.

However, this progression is not linear. The level and intensity of supervision must adjust whenever circumstances change or new risks emerge. Supervision may need to intensify when

- concerns arise about competence or performance
- the supervisee encounters unfamiliar or complex client populations
- new techniques or modalities are introduced
- ethical uncertainty increases
- organizational or personal pressures affect practice.

In these situations, the supervisor may temporarily return to more structured or directive approaches, such as increasing case reviews, resuming direct observation, or meeting more frequently. This can protect client safety, reinforce ethical practice, and support the supervisee's continued development.

This responsive, risk informed approach to the supervision process acknowledges that competent practice is shaped over time and within context. By matching the level of oversight to the supervisee’s developmental needs and the complexity of the work, supervisors maintain accountability, support growth, and manage risk while fostering professional confidence and independence.

Group and Individual Supervision

Supervision may be provided in individual, group, or combined formats, depending on the purpose of supervision, the level of risk and complexity of the work, and the developmental needs of supervisees. Regardless of format, supervision must provide appropriate oversight, feedback, and accountability for professional social work practice.

Individual Supervision

Individual supervision involves a one-to-one supervisory relationship and allows for focused, confidential exploration of practice, decision-making, and professional development. It is generally preferred or required when a supervisee is new to practice or role, working in higher risk or complex areas, expanding their scope of practice, or where practice concerns, remediation, or formal evaluation are needed.

Group Supervision

Group supervision involves one supervisor providing supervision to multiple supervisees simultaneously. It may occur within a shared practice setting or across different roles or organizations, provided the supervisor has the authority, competence, and capacity to oversee the practice being discussed. Group supervision can offer valuable opportunities for shared learning, collective reflection, exposure to diverse perspectives, and normalization of practice challenges.

Group supervision can support:

- Peer learning and reflective discussion
- Exposure to varied practice approaches and decision-making processes
- Development of professional identity and confidence
- Efficient use of supervisory resources in appropriate contexts

However, group supervision does not reduce or remove the supervisor’s responsibility or accountability for professional practice. The supervisor must ensure that group supervision provides sufficient oversight for each supervisee’s scope of practice and risk level, and that confidentiality, boundaries, and psychological safety are actively maintained.

Choosing Between Group and Individual Supervision

Group supervision may be appropriate when practice risks are moderate, confidentiality can be maintained, and the supervisory needs of

Although the term peer supervision is commonly used, supervision requires authority and accountability for professional practice. Where colleagues at a similar level engage in mutual reflection or case discussion without evaluative authority, this activity is more accurately described as peer consultation rather than practice supervision.

participants are comparable. Individual supervision is generally required when closer oversight, tailored feedback, or focused evaluation is necessary. In many settings, a blended approach combining group and individual supervision best supports reflective learning, competence development, and accountability.

Assigning Work

The supervisor is responsible for identifying and assigning activities that align with the supervisee's competence and stage of professional development. Supervisors must only assign tasks for which they themselves are competent, as this ensures they can provide effective guidance, evaluate performance accurately, and safeguard the quality and safety of client services. Assigning work that exceeds the supervisor's expertise compromises both responsibility and accountability.

Supervisors may delegate aspects of supervision—such as day-to-day oversight, skills coaching, or direct observation—to another qualified professional. This would be an individual who possesses the relevant knowledge, skills, credentials and experience to provide support in a specific area of practice. Examples include: a social worker with specialized expertise in a particular intervention, assessment tool, or client population; a regulated professional in a multidisciplinary setting (e.g., nurse, occupational therapist, psychologist); or a senior practitioner or field instructor supporting a student or novice social worker.

Delegation does not transfer accountability. The primary supervisor remains fully accountable for all supervision decisions, the adequacy of client care, and the professional development of the supervisee. When supervision is delegated, the supervisor must:

- Maintain ongoing communication with the individual providing delegated supervision,
- Actively seek feedback on the supervisee's performance, learning needs, and readiness for increased responsibility, and
- Ensure that delegated supervision aligns with professional standards, organizational policies, and the agreed scope of supervision.

In organizational settings, practice supervision may occur alongside administrative supervision. Where supervision roles are held by different individuals—such as an internal or external practice supervisor and an organizational manager—clear communication and collaboration are essential. Practice supervisors should, with the supervisee's knowledge and consent and in accordance with organizational policy, maintain appropriate coordination with administrative supervisors to support safe practice, role clarity, and continuity of oversight. This collaboration does not transfer supervisory accountability, nor does it replace the need for clearly defined supervision agreements that distinguish practice supervision from administrative management.

By structuring work assignment in this way, supervisors fulfill both their responsibility to guide and support learning and their accountability to clients, the organization, and

regulatory standards, while ensuring safe and competent service delivery even when aspects of supervision are shared.

Supervising other Regulated Professionals and Unregulated Individuals

While the ACSW Standards of Practice focus on supervision of social workers, the same principles of competent, accountable, and ethical oversight apply when supervising unregulated staff or other regulated professionals. Supervisors should ensure supervision aligns with the supervisee's role, scope, and training, clearly document responsibilities, and provide structured support to mitigate risk and protect the public.

Maintaining Boundaries

Maintaining appropriate professional boundaries is essential to an effective and ethical supervisory relationship. Boundaries support clarity of roles, reinforce the purpose and authority of supervision, and create conditions where supervisees can engage openly in reflection, learning, and evaluation. In alignment with the ACSW Standards of Practice, supervisors must recognize the inherent power differential within supervision and ensure that this authority is exercised in a manner that is transparent, respectful, and free from personal, social, financial, or organizational influences that could compromise professional judgement or objectivity. This includes actively identifying and managing real or perceived conflicts of interest, as well as circumstances where dual or multiple role relationships may occur, to prevent blurred responsibilities, impaired decision making, or unintended pressures on the supervisory process.

Supervisors must establish and communicate clear expectations regarding communication methods, availability, confidentiality, and the scope and limits of the supervisory role. Supervisors should remain attentive to early signs that boundaries may be blurring, including movement away from the established supervisory focus, uneven expectations, or growing uncertainty about roles. When such issues appear, supervisors are expected to act promptly by clarifying expectations, seeking consultation, or revising the supervision plan as needed.

Where questions about boundaries arise, supervisors and supervisees should engage in open dialogue and, when necessary, seek consultation to ensure decisions are guided by ethical standards, regulatory requirements, and the overarching responsibility to promote competent, accountable, and reflective social work practice. This includes distinguishing between practice-focused debriefing following critical incidents or adverse practice events and activities that fall outside the scope of supervision, such as personal therapy.

Thorough documentation of boundary issues, mitigation strategies, and supervisory decisions further supports transparency and consistency, and reinforces the integrity of the supervisory relationship.

Managing Dual or Multiple Relationships

Dual or multiple role relationships can arise in supervision when the supervisor and supervisee have, or previously had, other relationships (e.g., teacher/student, familial, financial, social, administrative, or legal). These situations create risks for conflicts of interest, blurred authority, impaired judgement, and potential harm. Supervision must be structured to prevent exploitation, protect the public, and uphold ethical competent practice. Reflective questions to help manage dual roles in supervision can be found in [Appendix G](#).

Receiving Feedback about Supervision

The ACSW expects social workers who provide supervision to participate in continuing competence activities related to the provision of supervision as seen in the following standard:

Standard	Description
G.1 (i)	(i) When a social worker provides supervision, the supervision must be ethical, competent, and consistent with these standards of practice. A social worker who is responsible for the supervision of others will: <ol style="list-style-type: none">be aware of the different types of supervision and multiple responsibilities of a supervisor

This supports reflective practice, strengthens supervisory competence, and helps supervisors manage complex ethical, relational, and organizational challenges that arise in supervision.

This expectation may be met through a range of continuing education or professional engagement activities related to supervision. Examples of activities include:

- Peer consultation/communities of practice
- Professional networks
- Supervision of supervision
- Continuing education
- Communities of practice
- Scholarly or self-directed learning

Providing Evaluations

Evaluation is a natural and important part of supervision. Supervisors provide both ongoing feedback to support learning and periodic assessments to determine whether a supervisee is meeting role expectations and practising safely and competently. These evaluations help guide professional development while also supporting accountability to clients, organizations, and the public.

It is helpful to make the evaluation process clear from the beginning of the supervisory relationship. Being transparent about these expectations helps reduce uncertainty and supports a shared understanding of how progress will be measured. The following ACSW Standard relates to the requirement for supervisors to provide supervisees with copies of any formal evaluations

Standard	Description
F.2 (c)	<p>(a) A social worker will respect the dignity of supervisees, students, and research subjects and will comply with all relevant statutes and administrative rules concerning conduct toward supervisees, students, and research subjects.</p> <p>(b) A social worker who has the responsibility for hiring or evaluating the performance of other staff members will fulfill such responsibilities in a fair, considerate, and equitable manner, using clearly defined criteria.</p> <p>(c) A social worker who has the responsibility for evaluating the performance of colleagues, employees, supervisees, or students will share their evaluations with them.</p>

Feedback is most effective when it is specific, timely and grounded in professional expectations. Supervisors should connect feedback to relevant standards of practice, organizational policies, and the supervisee's scope of role or responsibility. When areas for growth are identified, supervisors should clearly outline expectations for improvement and discuss strategies or supports that may help the supervisee strengthen their practice. Additional information on giving feedback effectively is available in this resource, [Giving and receiving feedback](#), available on the ACSW website.

At times, supervisors may become concerned about competence, ethical practice, or risks related to service delivery. When this occurs, supervisors should increase oversight, provide clear feedback, and document steps taken to address concerns. In some settings, supervisors may not have the authority to manage performance or take disciplinary action. In those situations, it is important to escalate concerns to the appropriate individual or level of leadership while continuing to support the supervisee and protect client and public safety.

Documenting Supervision

Social workers are expected to maintain records appropriate to the type of service being provided and are required to document supervision, as detailed in the following standard.

Standard	Description
G.1 (i) (iii)	(i) A social worker who is responsible for the supervision of others will: iii. keep appropriate records of supervision

Supervisors should maintain a supervision log to document completion of supervision activities outlined in the plan. Documentation should include the name of the supervisee, date supervision was provided, and the nature of the service provided, such as direct observation, documentation review, direction provided, etc.

This documentation helps track progress and supports transparent, accountable supervision by creating a clear record of decisions, feedback, risk management actions, and the supervisee's development over time (ACSW, 2023).

Supervisors should make reasonable efforts to maintain and retain records in accordance with organizational and regulatory expectations, even when formal record keeping systems are limited. Social workers will protect the confidentiality of all professionally acquired information and will disclose such information only when properly authorized or obligated legally or professionally to do so.

Supervision Transitions and Continuity

Supervision can be time-limited or connected to a particular role, learning goal, or employment context. However, the professional responsibility to seek ongoing supervision or peer consultation appropriate to one's field of practice and setting continues throughout a social worker's career, as noted in the following standard.

Standard	Description
G.1 (g)	(g) A social worker will have ongoing practice/clinical supervision or peer consultation appropriate to their field of practice and setting.:

When a specific supervisory relationship ends, care should be taken to transition supervision in a way that safeguards clients, supports continuity of professional oversight, and clearly marks the conclusion of supervisory authority.

Whenever possible, anticipate the end of supervision (for example, due to a role change, completion of supervision goals, the end of a supervision agreement, or employment transitions). Providing reasonable notice allows time to address outstanding issues, transition responsibilities, and ensure that clients or projects are not disrupted. Where

services to clients are affected, follow relevant standards related to termination, continuity of service, and referral.

Finalize and securely retain supervision documentation in line with standards for record content, confidentiality, maintenance and disposal. Clarify access and retention periods based on organizational policy and applicable law.

DRAFT for Consultation Only

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The documents in the appendices will be added at the end of the document or be clickable links within the document.

Appendix A: Frequently Asked Questions

Question	Response
Are there minimum hours for supervision?	This is a placeholder for FAQs
How do you evaluate competence without hours?	
Can a provisionally registered social worker provide supervision?	
Does the person providing supervision have to be a registered social worker?	
Does the regulated health professional have to be registered in Alberta?	
What are reasonable fees for supervision?	
What do I do if my employment supervisor is not providing me with the supervision I require?	
What if my supervisor is unexpectedly unavailable?	
What if my supervisor provides direction I disagree with?	
What responsibilities or obligations do I have as an external supervisee and my supervisee becomes ill and unable to practice?	
What do I do if I am an external supervisor and am concerned about the supervisee's practice?	
I work in a setting where teaching social workers new to practice is expected, how do I inform clients when this is not a standard practice?	
I have been hired into a role within the scope of social work practice. I have been told supervision will be provided. How do I know if the supervisor meets the ACSW requirements and supervision will be accepted by the ACSW?	
Can I count supervision hours accrued prior to being registered or having an identified supervisor within an agency?	

I work in a practice context where access to supervision is difficult (funding, lack of RSWs, privacy constraints etc.). what advice does ACSW have for me in meeting supervisory requirements?	
What do I do if an employer is not supporting the supervision I require?	
What if I learn that my supervisor is not eligible to provide supervision after completing the hours (e.g. they are provisional)	
Who and how will a registrant's attempts to access supervision be monitored?	

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Appendix B: Differentiating Professional Support Roles

Supervision is one example of professional support in the practice of social work. Not all professional support involves authority over practice. Practice supervision is distinguished by its focus on accountability for professional social work practice and the authority to evaluate, direct, and oversee professional decisions and service delivery. Other forms of professional support such as consultation, mentoring, or coaching may be valuable but do not carry authority or accountability for practice. The following table clarifies the distinctions between supervising, consulting, coaching and mentoring.

Dimension	Supervising	Consulting	Coaching	Mentoring
Primary Purpose	Oversight of practice; professional development; client protection	Provide expert input, perspective, and expanded options related to specific cases, issues, or areas of expertise	Enhance performance, goal attainment, confidence, and skill or leadership development	Support professional growth, career development, identity formation, and wisdom-sharing
Authority Structure	Formal, hierarchical	Non-hierarchical and collegial (even when occurring within supervision)	Collaborative and developmental; may occur within a hierarchical context	Typically non-hierarchical; relational and developmental
Evaluative Function	Yes — includes performance evaluation	No formal evaluative function (though supervisor retains evaluation authority if embedded in supervision)	Typically non-evaluative, though evaluative authority may remain in the background if part of supervision	No formal evaluation; feedback is developmental and supportive
Accountability for Outcomes	Supervisor shares responsibility practitioner competence	Practitioner retains responsibility for decisions and outcomes	Practitioner retains responsibility for decisions and outcomes (ultimate responsibility remains with supervisor when embedded in supervision)	Mentee retains responsibility for learning and professional decisions
Focus of Attention	Worker development and quality of client services	Specific cases, challenges, questions, or areas requiring expertise	Skill development, performance improvement, confidence-building, and leadership capacity	Long-term professional growth, role socialization, confidence, and career trajectory
Scope	Ongoing, comprehensive	Often time-limited and issue-specific	Often goal-focused and time-defined	Typically long-term and evolving
Power Differential	Explicit and structural	Minimal or absent	Minimal to moderate, depending on context and organizational setting	Minimal; based on experience rather than authority

Decision Making Authority	Supervisor may direct, approve or restrict practice	Consultant advises and offers perspectives; does not direct practice	Coach facilitates reflection and learning; does not direct practice	Mentee makes decisions; mentor offers guidance and perspective
Typical Outcomes	Competence, ethical practice, risk management, professional growth	Increased clarity, informed decision-making, and expanded practice options	Improved skills, performance, confidence, and capacity for self-directed growth	Increased confidence, professional identity, leadership capacity, and career satisfaction

Bogo, 2022; Davys & Beddoe, 2020; Falender & Shafranske 2004, 2017, 2017.

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Appendix C: Competence Areas and Indicators

COMPETENCE AREA	COMPETENCE INDICATOR
Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates sustained competence and experience in the practice being supervised • Understands relevant interventions, professional responsibilities, risks, and limitations of practice • Applies practice knowledge to guide supervisee decision making and problem solving • Maintains current knowledge of evolving standards, research, and practice developments
Ethical and Professional Integrity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates knowledge of applicable legislation, Standards of Practice, and Code of Ethics • Integrates professional and regulatory expectations into supervisory guidance and evaluation • Maintains appropriate professional boundaries and manages power dynamics in supervision • Engages in ongoing learning and consultation related to supervisory practice
Supervision-Specific Knowledge and Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates knowledge of supervision models, approaches, and methods • Structures supervision intentionally, including goal setting, agenda setting, and documentation • Uses a range of supervisory methods such as teaching, coaching, modelling, and reflective discussion • Adapts supervision approaches to the developmental level, role, and learning needs of the supervisee
Evaluative Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assesses supervisee competence using multiple sources of information (e.g., observation, documentation review, case discussion) • Provides timely, specific and constructive feedback • Conducts both formative and summative evaluations of practice • Documents supervision discussions, evaluations, and decisions appropriately
Risk Management and Ethical Judgment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognizes ethical concerns, competence gaps, and practice risks early • Provides corrective feedback and increased oversight when concerns arise • Takes appropriate action to address risks to clients, organizations, or the public • Escalates concerns through appropriate organizational or regulatory channels when required
Relational and Communication Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishes respectful and professional supervisory relationships • Communicates expectations clearly and addresses concerns directly • Encourages reflection and open discussion of challenges and mistakes

- Recognizes and responds to power dynamics, cultural differences, and systemic inequities
-

Contextual and Organizational Awareness

- Demonstrates awareness of organizational policies, role expectations, and system pressures affecting practice
 - Supports supervisees in navigating tensions between organizational requirements and professional standards
 - Ensures sufficient time and organizational support for regular supervision activities
 - In multidisciplinary settings, clarifies roles and collaborates with discipline-specific supervisors when evaluation of professional competence falls outside the supervisor's expertise
-

Reflective Practice Skills

- Encourages critical reflection on practice decisions, ethical dilemmas, and organizational challenges
- Supports supervisees in identifying learning needs and professional development goals
- Reflects on their own supervisory practice and seeks consultation or feedback when needed
- Engages in continuing professional development related to supervision

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Appendix D: ACSW Requirements for Supervision in Standards of Practice

The table below notes all standards where supervision or supervision-linked competence expectations are included.

STANDARD	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETIVE GUIDANCE
B.6(a)	Use of Assessment Instruments Social workers will receive training and supervision as is appropriate prior to using assessment instruments independently.	<i>“as is appropriate”</i> does not mean optional or informal. It recognizes that supervision and training requirements must be proportionate to the assessment instrument being used, the complexity and risk of the practice context, and the social worker’s demonstrated competence.
E.3(m)	Technology in Social Work Practice When using or providing supervision and consultation by technological means, a social worker will follow the standards that would be applied to a face-to-face supervisory relationship and will be competent in the technologies used.	Standard G.1(i) applies when providing supervision virtually.
E.4(b)	Limits on Practice & Adding New Services or Techniques A social worker will limit her or his practice to areas in which the social worker has gained competence through education, training, or supervised experience.	The standard deliberately uses “education, training, or supervised experience” rather than mandating supervision in all cases. This allows for flexibility while still prioritizing public protection.
F.4(e)	Impaired Ability to Perform A social worker whose ability to provide professional services is impaired will seek supervision in developing a plan for managing responsibilities to clients and others as may be appropriate. Where the social worker does not have a direct supervisor/manager the social worker will consult with a colleague.	Supervision is expected when practice involves significant risk, complexity, or uncertainty, or when a social worker is new to a role, population, method, or context. Training or education alone may be sufficient in lower-risk areas where competence can be readily established.
F.5(c)	Dual/Multiple Role Relationship If a dual/multiple role relationship other than those noted in section F.7 develops and is discovered after the professional relationship has been initiated, the social worker will seek supervision or where no supervisor exists, consultation regarding the relationship and: i. Discuss the possible consequences of the dual/multiple role relationship with the client	Consultation may supplement supervision, but it does not replace supervision where authority and accountability for practice are required.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ii. Terminate the professional relationship if it is in the client’s best interests to do so; and iii. If appropriate, assist the client in obtaining professional services from another social worker or another professional 	
F.5(e)	<p>Dual/Multiple Role Relationship A social worker who continues to provide professional services when a dual/multiple role relationship may exist must seek regular consultation/supervision with another social worker regarding the dual/multiple role relationship and subsequent provision of professional services to the client and include the contents of the consultation in the client’s record.</p>	
G.1(i)	<p>Providing Supervision When a social worker provides supervision, the supervision must be ethical, competent, and consistent with these Standards of Practice. A social worker who is responsible for the supervision of others will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. be aware of the different types of supervision and multiple responsibilities of a supervisor; ii. participate in continuing competence activities related to the provision of supervision; and iii. keep appropriate records of supervision. 	<p>This standard establishes that providing supervision is itself an area of professional practice that requires ongoing competence, not a static role or an automatic extension of practice expertise. Supervisors are expected to actively maintain and develop the knowledge, skills, and judgement required to supervise effectively and responsibly</p> <p>Ongoing learning is an expectation, not a one-time requirement</p> <p>Participation in continuing competence activities (continuing education and/or professional engagement) related to supervision reflects the evolving nature of supervisory practice.</p>

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Appendix E: Reflective Questions for Supervisors and Supervisees

These questions support supervisors and supervisees in shared reflection and dialogue prior to establishing supervision.

Supervisor Questions

<i>Scope & Role Clarity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Am I clear on the purpose and scope of the supervision (e.g., practice supervision, administrative oversight, regulatory requirements)?• Does this supervision fall within my own scope of practice and competence?
<i>Competence & Experience</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do I have the skills required for supervision, including feedback, evaluation, documentation, and reflective facilitation?
<i>Authority & Accountability</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can I determine and adjust the methods and frequency of supervision?• Do I have the authority to provide meaningful supervision, including the ability to address performance concerns and escalate risks?• Am I prepared to be accountable for oversight and shared responsibility for outcomes within the scope of supervision?
<i>Time & Capacity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do I have adequate time to provide regular, structured, and responsive supervision?
<i>Power, Ethics & Equity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How might power dynamics, differences (social, cultural, structural and positional), or organizational context affect the supervisory relationship?• Am I prepared to practice supervision in an ethical, culturally responsive, and anti-oppressive manner?
<i>Supports & Consultation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do I have access to consultation or organizational support for complex or high-risk situations?

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Appendix F: Reflective Questions – Consent

The following reflective questions provide practical considerations to support social workers in applying consent requirements when supervision occurs as part of professional practice.

Transparency and expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have I informed the individuals, groups, communities, students, or colleagues I work with that supervision or professional consultation may occur as part of maintaining competent practice?• How might I reasonably communicate the role of supervision in this practice context (e.g., orientation materials, program information, course outlines, research protocols)?• Would someone involved in this work reasonably expect that consultation or supervision may occur?
Understanding when explicit consent may be required	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does this supervision activity involve direct observation, recording, or participation by others that would require explicit consent?• Have I explained who will observe, what the purpose is, and how information will be used or stored?• Have I ensured that consent is voluntary and informed, including the ability to decline where appropriate?
Context and feasibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is it reasonable and practical to seek consent in this situation, or are there time-sensitive or organizational factors that affect how consent can be addressed?• If consent cannot be discussed in advance, how can I ensure transparency at another appropriate point?
Documentation and clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have I documented consent when required (e.g., observation or recording)?• Is it clear who is responsible for obtaining and documenting consent within the supervision arrangement?

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Appendix F: Reflective Questions for Managing Dual Roles in Supervision

The following reflective questions provide additional guidance for identifying and managing dual roles within supervision.

Identify and avoid conflicts of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do I have, or have I had, any personal, professional, or financial relationships with this supervisee that could influence my judgement?• Are there potential or perceived conflicts that might affect how I evaluate or support the supervisee?• Have I considered how the dual role might impact clients, colleagues, or the organization?
Disclose and document	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have I openly discussed the dual role with the supervisee, and where appropriate, with clients or the organization?• Have I clearly outlined the risks and mitigation strategies associated with the dual role?• Am I documenting decisions, discussions, and mitigation measures in a way that is secure, confidential, and reviewable?• Do I have a plan for periodic review of this documentation to ensure ongoing risk management?
Clarify roles and authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have I clearly defined which aspects of supervision are practice-related versus administrative?• Are expectations and decision-making authority transparent to the supervisee and relevant stakeholders?• Are there areas where my administrative and practice responsibilities overlap, and if so, how will I manage or delegate them?• Have I established clear boundaries around my authority to direct, evaluate, or make decisions about the supervisee's work?
Set decision/rules for escalation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Am I confident that safeguards are in place to protect the supervisee, clients, and myself in situations of dual roles?
Respect prohibited relationships and power differentials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are there dynamics in this supervisory relationship that could be perceived as exploitative or biased?• What steps am I taking to maintain professional boundaries and mitigate risks related to power differentials?

Appendix G: Developing a Supervision Plan

This appendix identifies components of a supervision plan. This is provided as an example only.

<i>Format & Schedule</i>	Determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The methods of supervision that will be used for the supervisee's assigned responsibilities (e.g., direct observation, documentation review, reflective supervision)• Any boundaries or restrictions placed on the supervisee's practice at this stage of their development• Information about confidentiality, privacy• Individual or group supervision• In person/virtual supervision
<i>Terms & Duration</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Effective date• Duration of supervision and each session• Purpose of supervision
<i>Compensation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hourly rate• Who is paying (individual or organization)• Cancellation policy• Liability insurance coverage
<i>Evaluation & Schedule of Evaluation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How often the supervisor will evaluate the supervisee's performance• How will changes to the supervision plan be completed (e.g., increase in client complexity, change in supervision method)
<i>Documentation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will supervision be documented• Where will documentation be stored• How will the supervisee receive a record of supervision and evaluations• Who else will have access
<i>Addressing Concerns (in practice &/or supervisory relationship)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will feedback be provided• How will concerns be addressed and escalated• How approval for external supervision and communication amongst others in oversight roles will be managed (manager, regulatory college, credentialing body, etc.)• When supervision might be terminated

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