


SUPERVISING UNDERPERFORMING AND/OR IMPAIRED WORKERS

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR FAMILY CENTERED PRACTICE
COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE THROUGH SUPERVISION



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WORKSHOP AGENDA

Underperformance:

- ⊙ Group Discussion of Underperformance
- ⊙ Assessment Flowchart
- ⊙ Peer Coaching in Addressing Current Concern

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WORKSHOP AGENDA

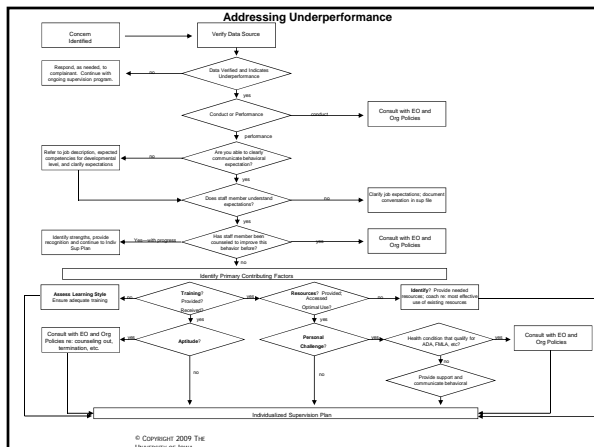
Impairment:

- ⊙ Definition and Overview of Impairment
- ⊙ Identification of performance problems indicative of impairment
- ⊙ Discussion & Application
- ⊙ Documentation Guidelines
- ⊙ Supervisory Performance Interview Guidelines

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SUPERVISING UNDERPERFORMING STAFF

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INITIAL STEPS

- ⊙ **Concern Identified**
 - Verification of Data Source
 - Confirmation of Concern
- ⊙ **Procedural Assessment**
 - Conduct or performance?
- ⊙ **Assessment**
 - Perception
 - Progress

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ASSESSING FOR PRIMARY CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- Training
- Resources
- Aptitude
- Personal Factors
- Environmental Considerations

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INTERVENTION

- ⊙ Individualized Supervision Program
- ⊙ Implementation
- ⊙ Evaluation

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EXERCISE ONE: ASSESSING PRIMARY CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

- ⊙ Form groups of two or three
- ⊙ Using the handout, Supervisory Assessment Sample Questions, assess for primary contributing factors with one or more worker underperformance situations you face with supervisees

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EXERCISE ONE

1. Take turns sharing a worker underperformance situation
2. Work through each situation, using the assessment steps, adding to the suggested supervisory questions
3. When primary contributing factors are identified, refer back to the flow chart for action steps.

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NINE FEEDBACK ERRORS

1. Group-only feedback
2. End-user feedback
3. The "devil made me do it"
4. "Worker A - Worker B" feedback
5. Lock it away mentality
6. Information vs. feedback
7. Delayed feedback
8. "Only let them know when they screw up"
9. "Puzzle" feedback



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UNDERPERFORMANCE DUE TO IMPAIRMENT

Underperformance that is due to personal factors impacting their professional work and/or their individual emotional response to the work

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WORKER IMPAIRMENT

- Changes in performance behavior indicative of impairment
- Guidelines for documentation
- Discussing performance issues with supervisees
- Supervisors moving beyond “take my advice, I’m not using it”

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SUPERVISING IMPAIRED STAFF

Definition:

Professional impairment is a pattern of underperformance caused by psychosocial stressors, resulting in professional functioning *below acceptable practice standards*.

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SCOPE OF IMPAIRMENT

- An estimated 20% of all workers suffer from some type of impairment at any given time
- Substance abuse is the most frequent cause, estimated at 10-15% of social workers
- Half of all social workers report seeing colleagues whom they believe have substance abuse problems
- Social workers under age 65 have a significantly greater suicide rate than the general population
(NASW)

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NASW CODE OF ETHICS

Responsibility for self:

Social workers should not allow personal problems, psychosocial distress or mental health difficulties to interfere with their professional judgment, performance, or responsibilities to clients.

Social workers who experience these problems should *immediately seek consultation and take appropriate remedial action* by seeking professional help, making adjustments in workload, terminating practice, or taking any other steps necessary to protect clients and others.

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NASW CODE OF ETHICS

Responsibility for others:

Social workers with direct knowledge of another social worker's impairment should, when feasible, consult with and assist the social worker in taking remedial action

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CHALLENGES

- Failing to recognize own impaired functioning
- Avoiding intervening with colleagues
- Agency factors: organizational structures, unsafe environments in which to admit problems
- Lack of time or resources for acknowledging, preventing, or addressing needs of impaired workers
- Stress and time management skills not enough, address only part of problem

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IMPACT

- ⊙ Jeopardizes client right to safe and effective services
- ⊙ Increases risk of unethical conduct, and malpractice
- ⊙ Negatively impacts human services profession in general
- ⊙ Losses to workers and families

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FACTORS INDICATING IMPAIRMENT RISK

- ⊙ Decreased productivity
- ⊙ Frequent absenteeism
- ⊙ Poor work relationships
- ⊙ Changes in habits
- ⊙ Frequent or prolonged absences from work area
- ⊙ Increased personal phone calls

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EXERCISE TWO

- ⊙ Find a partner
- ⊙ Mutually identify your own signs of risk for impaired functioning.
- ⊙ Next, discuss with your partner what you know about the signs of risk for your workers' impaired functioning

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DOCUMENTATION GUIDELINES

- ⊙ Be objective
- ⊙ Record measurable facts (photocopy/document)
- ⊙ Note what is different, what has changed
- ⊙ Be specific: date, time, place, problem with performance
- ⊙ Write observations, not opinions, conclusions, or diagnoses
- ⊙ Include strengths
- ⊙ Show pattern of underperformance through daily documentation of concerns

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SUPERVISORY FOCUS

LOOK AT BEHAVIORS TO DOCUMENT AS IF YOU ARE WALKING AROUND WITH A VIDEO CAMERA

RECORD ONLY WHAT YOU CAN SEE AND HEAR ON THE "TAPE"

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SUPERVISORY PERFORMANCE INTERVIEW

- ⊙ Schedule private time/place
- ⊙ Get straight to the point with concerns/examples
- ⊙ Mutually identify contributing factors
- ⊙ Review prepared document
- ⊙ Ask worker for input

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SUPERVISORY PERFORMANCE INTERVIEW

Make sure to:

- ⦿ Use active listening skills
- ⦿ Ask how you can help
- ⦿ Identify specific steps for change
- ⦿ Set date for follow-up meeting

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EXERCISE THREE:

- ⦿ Return to same partner
- ⦿ Using Interview Preparation Practice handout, develop a document for addressing one impaired worker situation you or a colleague is facing with a supervisee

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FINAL THOUGHTS

- ⦿ Wrap up
 - Observations/feedback
- ⦿ Next steps:
 - ⦿ Increase safety to address/prevent
 - ⦿ Mutually identify red flags to risk
 - ⦿ Commit to self-care and modeling
 - ⦿ Partner with impaired workers to restore functioning

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