



Group Supervision Process: Words and Pictures

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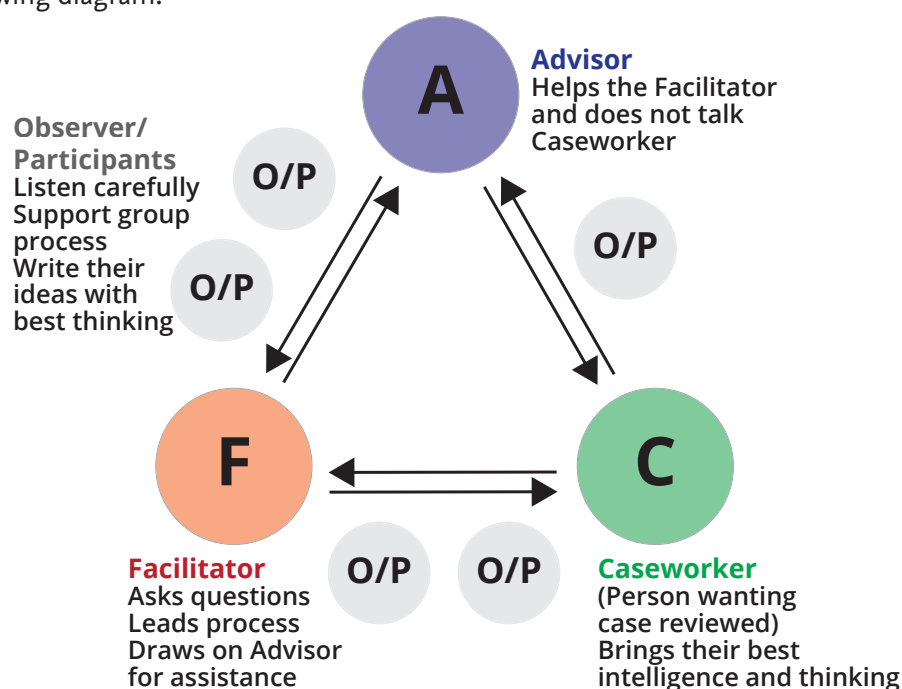
Thinking About Words and Pictures Explanations

For any safety plan to make sense to children, they must have an explanation of the past issues and problems that require the development of a safety plan. For children and young people who have been in care for a significant period of time, inevitably there is also a mixture of explanations they have heard about why they were removed from the parents. Alongside this, carers and professionals are often uncertain how and what to tell children. In this context a sense of silencing and secrecy can quickly build up for everyone involved.

The Words and Pictures process is designed to deal with the silencing, secrecy, mixed messages and confusions that surround child maltreatment and the circumstances that lead to children being placed in care, and to deal with this directly in the relationship between the parents and the children. A Words and Pictures explanation is first and foremost the parents' explanation of the child protection issues for the children. Created together with the professionals, it is an explanation, or set of age-appropriate 'words', that lays out the child protection concerns to the children and later to extended family and friends. When the words are explained to the children, a set of 'pictures' are also created to match the explanation and to facilitate the children's understanding. Hence it is a 'Words and Pictures' process. The explanation creates a foundation of openness within the family and their network from which a meaningful safety plan can be created.

Group Supervision Process

This Signs of Safety group supervision process is designed for groups of 4 to 10 people. It revolves around the caseworker who brings forward the case. (Sometimes, of course, there is a number of people bringing forward the case). The facilitator leads the group process, assisted by an advisor. Other group members are involved as observers/participants. The roles of each are described in the following diagram:



The entire group, but in particular the facilitator and advisor, must focus on the process and not get caught up or over-organised about the content and detail of the case. This process is all about growing the capacity for the team to create together a fast process for working through, and getting direction in, a case. As with every meeting in child protection, effective meetings are always led skilfully.

Group Process

1. Introductions (2 to 3 minutes)

If the group is new to the group supervision method the facilitator should introduce the process including a quick description of what each person's role:

- The facilitator is THE ONLY person that talks directly to the caseworker
- The advisor acts to assist the facilitator to lead the process
- The Observer/Participants have the opportunity to learn by staying out of the content of the case and focusing on analysis and judgement process thereby assisting the worker to gain a better overview of the case and the direction he or she wants to take.

The facilitator has the professionals, the caseworker, and anyone directly involved in the case say who they are, what their role in the case is, and how long they have been involved in the case. The facilitator will probably need to prevent the professionals involved in the case from going into case content at this point.

2. Genogram (3–5 minutes)

The facilitator draws the family genogram to include the basic information of age along with the names of the immediate family parents, partners, children, extended family members, and relevant friends. This should include clarifying where children are living, if not with one or both parents. Again, to keep the process focused, this is not the time to describe case information.

Once complete, the facilitator can ask the worker: 'Is there anyone else the children or parents would say are important in their lives that we haven't got on the board yet?' Add these to the genogram.

3. Background Information (3–5 minutes)

The facilitator gives the worker 3–5 minutes to provide an overview of the case, usually by asking, 'What makes this an open child protection case now?' The worker should be allowed to talk without interruption. The facilitator and observers should make notes of the worker's exact words and begin to analyse the information. While listening, the facilitator can make notes at the side of the whiteboard and should not be trying to 'map' the case by locating information into particular columns. The more experienced workers become at using the process, the more succinct they will be at providing the critical information that is needed to move through the process.

4. Worker's Goal/Purpose (3–5 minutes)

Purpose: The facilitator asks the worker for the purpose of creating a Words and Pictures. 'Why do you want this or think it is important for your case, and for the child and the family?'

This is THE MOST important part of the four preparatory steps because it provides clear focus for the facilitator and group as to the purpose for preparing a draft Words and Pictures explanation. Ask: 'What do you want out of this consultation in order to be able to write the draft Words and Pictures for the case?' The facilitator should dig in a little to get a clear, specific purpose for the Words and Pictures. If the worker says, 'I want to know what to do next,' this is too general and the facilitator should ask what specifically they feel they need help with in order to figure out what to focus on next to help get the process started.

If the worker provides a general goal or one that can't necessarily be achieved in the session, such as 'I want an explanation for the child about why he is in care', the facilitator can identify this and ask something like this: 'OK, so you want to have an explanation for why the child is in care. What do you need from this consultation to help you move toward being able to write the draft you feel captures what you know that you can take to the family with confidence?' Remember the Words and Pictures explanation will be the parent's explanation for their child/children with clear bottom lines from CPS about what must be in the story. However, it is not something that can be completed in this consultation because the family and other key stakeholders are not present.

5. Interviewing the Worker

When steps 1 to 4 are complete, the facilitator asks everyone to individually write down on a piece of paper (that can be handed to the worker) the best questions they can think of for this case to get information from the worker that will help write a draft Words and Pictures explanation. The questions are created to be posed to the worker first and then for the worker to take to the family. During the interview the worker is noting the pieces of information they see they now need to obtain from the family/child/extended/carers to first write the draft and then to help lead the family in finalising the Words and Pictures explanation.

These questions should be targeted at both the positive and negative aspects of the family's unique situation and should seek to gain the different perspectives of all those connected to the family and the case. Questions should be written out fully in the form they would actually be asked. Good questions should be relevant and be able to be asked of everyone involved: the parents, children, extended family members, and professionals who are involved in the case. At least half of the questions should be written as relationship questions. (5 minutes)

6. Sharing the work

- 6.1 Everyone reads out one or two of their strongest questions to the large group.
- 6.2 The facilitator then interviews the worker, using the worker's own questions and some of the best questions from the group.
- 6.3 All group members give their questions to the caseworker.
- 6.4 The facilitator can review the process by asking the worker: 'What has been most useful for you about the process so far?' The facilitator could also ask: 'On a scale of 0 to 10 – where 10 means I've got what I need from the consult already and 0 means I'm no better off or any clearer than when we started – where are you?'

7. Draft a 'Rough' Positive Frame

The facilitator asks everyone in the group to draft a frame for the Words and Pictures that focuses on the positive elements of the family. Getting workers to do this enables them to get out of the anxiety-provoking task of writing the difficult aspects. This gives workers practice at simple, child-friendly language without the extra pressure of finding the words for a difficult conversation at the same time. Remind workers to focus on the strengths and/or existing safety within the family. This is the opportunity to help the family develop resilience and pride within their family group.

8. Picture for the Positive

The facilitator asks everyone in the group individually to draw a picture that matches the frame for the positive aspect of the family. Workers need to think about the elements of the positive frame that they want to capture in the picture. What would be most meaningful for the family? Workers need to ensure the picture complements the words and vice versa.

9. Draft a 'Rough' Negative Frame

The facilitator asks everyone in the group to draft a frame for the Words and Pictures that talks about one of the negative aspects of the story. Getting workers to do this allows them to have an experience at finding words for the most difficult things for families to talk to children about. Remind workers to focus on the harm/danger for the child and to recall the information from the interview with the worker that identified past harm and future danger.

10. Picture for the Negative

The facilitator asks everyone in the group to work on drawing a picture for the negative frame. Workers need to think about the elements of the negative frame, especially what and how they think they can complement the words with a picture. Workers need to be reminded that they do not draw the actual trauma or incident (e.g. the violent incident, the actual abuse). Workers need to think about messages of reassurance and resilience, along with what they might like the child to do in the future or a similar situation.

11. Review and Next Steps

- 11.1. The facilitator now reviews the process so far by asking the worker: ‘What has been most useful for you about the process so far?’ Then the facilitator asks: ‘On a scale of 0 to 10 – where 10 means I’ve got what I need from the consult already and 0 means I’m no better off or any clearer than when we started – where are you?’ If the group has stayed on track, the worker should be rating relatively high at this stage. The facilitator then asks the worker if this is this enough for now. If the answer is yes, end here.

If no, the facilitator should ask: ‘What else do they need to focus on?’ Then the facilitator should spend some time on that, usually by listening to the issue and getting questions created for that issue.

A low rating from the worker probably indicates the group process has gone off track significantly from what the worker wanted, or that the worker actually now wants something else or perhaps is feeling swamped and anxious about the case. Whatever the problem, the facilitator will need to back up and help the worker identify where the sticking point is and agree on a process to deal with that.

12. Review Process for Group

The advisor leads a review with the whole group about what was useful, what they learned, and any issues they have. (The review should not be about the content of the case).

How Often Do We Use This Group Process in the Agency or Team?

When presenting and teaching this group mapping process, these questions are often asked: ‘How often should we do this in our agency? Do we do this in every case?’

This group process is designed to:

- build a shared, structured, collective team and agency culture, and process for thinking through cases using the Signs of Safety approach;
- enable child protection professionals to explore each other’s cases, bringing their best thinking, including alternative perspectives, and to do this without getting caught in one or two people dominating or the group telling the practitioner whose case it is or what they must do;
- develop a shared practice of bringing a questioning approach to casework, rather than trying to arrive at answers.

This group process cannot be undertaken in every case discussion. However, the process can be replicated in individual supervision and when practitioners are thinking through cases for themselves.

Building and sustaining this sort of questioning culture for thinking through cases as a team usually requires this process being undertaken at least once every two to four weeks.

The process presented here offers quite a tight structure, because helping professionals often tend to default to individual supervision, so group supervision is not a normal part of most agencies' practice. Where group supervision is normal, the group conversations can often be very free form and unstructured with little sense of shared purpose. If the majority of quality supervision is individual, this creates a very privatised practice culture within the agency, places excessive pressure on the team leaders or supervisors to be the fount of all wisdom for all practitioners, and limits the capacity to draw on the knowledge and experience of peers. Many supervisors and practitioners shy away from group supervision or, if they have to participate, they do so in a constrained way because of previous bad experiences. It is strongly suggested that supervisors and teams follow the process offered here closely, particularly as they build the habit of group supervision in their teams. This process is safe, well tested, refined, and avoids group dynamics where one or two people dominate.

The advisor role is central to the success of the group process. The advisor should be very active, checking in regularly with the facilitator about their sense of direction and effectiveness of what they are doing. Likewise, the facilitator should quickly draw on the advisor if they are feeling stuck or unsure.