

Mimi Choy-Brown ([00:07](#)):

My name is Mimi Choy-Brown. And this is the Heart of Supervision podcast. This podcast is about what supervision is, what it could be and why it matters for child welfare, from both a research and a practice informed perspective. I'm an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work. And this podcast is in collaboration with the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare.

Supervisee Quote ([00:33](#)):

My dream is that we have wonderful supervisors out there that I know we have. My dream is that they can do the work that they're good at. And that line staff can do the work that they're good at. That means we need relationships. We need support. We need strong, you know, healthy people to be able to go out and do that work.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([00:56](#)):

Welcome to the fourth episode of the Heart of Supervision podcast. So excited to present this episode focused on the current experiences and supervision from four voices from the field. One theme for my work and conversations with folks in child welfare is that so many are doing a lot of their learning on the job. We learn from hearing other stories about their supervision and watching how supervisors supervise in order to apply it to their own work. My hope is that this episode will be just a bit of that, providing opportunities to hear your colleagues experiences as if you were popping by their office or in passing after a meeting. You know, things we used to do before the pandemic. This episode is a little bit of a different format and includes pieces of four different conversations I had with experts in what supervision is like today. Practitioners just like you, who are working and participating in supervision right now in child welfare settings as either a supervisee or a supervisor. There was so much amazing content. And we had to make some super tough decisions on what to include here. But we've done our best to bring you some amazing nuggets of wisdom from your colleagues. I'm so grateful to have been able to talk with these wise, committed and thoughtful practitioners. The conversations were really inspiring and left me so hopeful knowing these leaders are out in the field.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([02:31](#)):

First, let's start off with brief introductions from each of our four voices from the field.

Speaker 2 ([02:39](#)):

I am a line staff. I work in family group decision making. I was raised by my parents were both social workers. <laugh> kinda an unusual, um, thing. And, um, but yeah, my, parents were both social workers.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([02:56](#)):

you were in the family business!

Speaker 2 ([02:57](#)):

Sure! It's the family business. I started as an intern, uh, in child protection investigations. I moved around, I was a children's case manager and then I've done foster care licensing. I've done, um, some adoptions, some recruiting for foster parents and adoptive parents. And now for the last like six years I've been in this family group decision making family group conferencing role,

Speaker 3 ([03:23](#)):

I don't know how I became a social worker. I think it was just my personality growing up in my senior picture under it. I wrote I'm going to be a social worker.

Mimi Choy-Brown (03:32):

Is that right? Oh my goodness.

Speaker 3 (03:34):

I did. I had to relook at that <laugh> and I, um, started it off working with children in out home placement. I left for a little bit to go to children's mental health and then came back into adoptions, went back to school, got my masters.

Speaker 4 (03:49):

The first opening that I got was in child welfare. So child welfare kind of chose me, I would say <laugh>. Uh, and then, so I've been in child welfare for a little over five years now, and I recently promoted to a supervisor position.

Speaker 5 (04:11):

I have been working in child welfare field generally for, oh, I should have added this up 10 to 15 years. I'm not, not entirely sure that the beginning of that was all mainly I was doing admin positions. I, uh, kind of wanted to see since I knew it would be a high trauma field. I wanted to see if I could tolerate just being around it before I tried to jump into now, can I actually be a direct part of it? And after several years of that and two different agencies decide, yep, no, I'm actually really bored with the admin angle. I wanna jump in, I wanna do this direct stuff. So when to get, to get my MSW and then moved into a direct service position, um, working mainly in adoption and permanency work. Um, and I did that for about five years and then got promoted and am now supervising the role I used to do and have done that for the last two years.

Mimi Choy-Brown (05:01):

My first question for these practitioners was if they could share their perspectives on why supervision matters within child welfare settings, why is supervision time so important within child welfare?

Speaker 2 (05:16):

I personally feel like, um, supervision you know, a good, good, supervision relationship, a good supervisor. It really makes all the difference. I know I've felt that in my years, as a social worker, you know, we all know that, um, child welfare work is super challenging work. We're social workers. And we know, we know this stuff, we know that relationships are co-regulating, right. We know that we need to be there for the kids and the families we work with. And so we need to be grounded. We need to be as, as, you know, kind of calm and as, as healthy and ha you know, have our own stuff together, as much as possible. And I just feel like that supervision relationship is so important because that person is there for us. You know, as the line staff like me, you know, it's someone I can come to and I can count on, you know, every week or every other week or whatnot.

Speaker 2 (06:17):

Um, having someone there who's, you know, an ear to listen a heart, you know, we need a heart to care. Um, we need someone with knowledge who can give us maybe a little more, a little guidance, a little

more than what we already have in our heads. Something that we haven't thought of. Um, and we also really need those boundaries, right? We need someone with healthy boundaries who can help us keep having those boundaries, um, because it's messy work, right? It's heavy work and it's messy work. Not that it's therapy for us, but it's that, it's that boost of you're on the right track. Have you thought of this? And just kind of like that, re-energizing us to go back out there and do the hard work that we need to do. And sometimes that means, you know, somebody who's listening to us, and sometimes that means somebody who's helping us, you know, advocate for us to change policy or to look at what we need to make things happen. What resources the families need that we haven't been able to find. There's definitely more layers of where, you know, where are we as the line staff stuck? And is there anything they can do?

Speaker 5 ([07:32](#)):

There's not like some magical like supervisor problem box that I can hand off the scary problems to her. And she puts it through the box. And now she has the solution. <laugh> child welfare is such a complicated field. And depending on your role in it, you are gonna have like DHS licensing requirements. You're gonna have laws, you have to follow, you're gonna have policies like all that. So just that is impossible to learn quickly. So you do in fact, need someone with more experience who has had the time to onboard all that information, cuz you can't expect any new worker to keep all that in their heads. It is a long haul of onboarding of like one to two years before you even have all that integrated. So you do need a supervisor, keep an eye on those things. Mm-hmm <affirmative> but I also just think it's, it's incredibly intense work, um, cuz all of the same individual and systemic power structures that, create and maintain all forms of prejudice in our society are also all focused kind of children are at the intersection of that, like decisions about what is, and isn't a family who does and doesn't deserve protection.

Speaker 5 ([08:39](#)):

Um, who's a perpetrator and who's a victim, who deserves autonomy who deserves help and who deserves punishment. That is all constant difficult problems in our society. And children just are at the center of that all the time. And so there's that combined with children bring up all of our own values, all of our own histories, um, all of our own personal feelings mm-hmm <affirmative>. And so that is so much to sort through at any given time. It makes child and family work so intense because it is pushing everybody's buttons all the time. Like it's not just one little button that's getting pressed. It's just like fists down, hitting every single button you can. And so then trying to make good case decisions when you're managing your own buttons, but also on teams full of people and all of their buttons are being pressed as well. And you're trying to navigate all that to come to a good decision that is client-focused and client-centered. It just needs so many more people to help you navigate through that.

Speaker 3 ([09:39](#)):

I think, um, going into this field, you have to know that one case isn't the same as the other. Some of them are very similar. You can't be a black and white thinker all the time. Like you have to kind of go widen your scope, the supports that are beneficial in working in the field in working with families and working with their complex needs is something that you have to think about working in this field. And then a supervisor is there to support that, and guide you through working through the difficult cases, any case, a case can come in that seems easy. And then, you meet with the families and something comes up and you can just sit there and say, oh my gosh, what do I do now? And that's where working with the supervisor who has knowledge, who has worked in the field, is very beneficial. Also, I really lean

on my supervisor to help me navigate through certain systems. I can honestly not remember every policy that is created every rule, every statute. So I really rely on my supervisor to help me with that.

Speaker 4 ([11:00](#)):

I think supervisees need a safe place, a place to be vulnerable, a place where they're not judged. They're not condemned, even if they're not doing everything a hundred percent, which is almost impossible to everything, a hundred percent, like there's a balance, right? But they just need that place where they know they're supported. Where they know that they will be encouraged, where they know that they can be open and they won't be judged. I had a, myself, had a time when I was going through grief and had a real hard case. It was just really hard. The mom would call me crying. I mean, I would get triggered. It was just really hard. And I went to supervision and I, you know, going through the cases and the more I talked about this case, my supervisor said, what do you think about us transferring this case?

Speaker 4 ([12:11](#)):

And I, and that had thought had not entered my mind at all. Mm-hmm <affirmative> and, and so when she asked that I was really hesitant and I don't even know why <laugh>, and, and I didn't really say yes or no, but she made the decision to transfer the case because she felt that at that point, it <affirmative>, it, it was better for me and for the client for the case to be transferred. So that that's just one example.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([12:39](#)):

Mm-hmm <affirmative>, mm-hmm, <affirmative> it sounds like she was sort of able to see something,

Speaker 4 ([12:44](#)):

Right. Yeah. Cause she knew me like your, your supervisor know knows you. Right. Mm-hmm <affirmative> um, even when you don't say something, they can tell about your body language, at least if they've been your supervisor for a while mm-hmm <affirmative>. So she recognized that it was very challenging for me I was, you know, having a hard time in my own life. And so the case was transferred.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([13:09](#)):

And how did that impact you to have it transferred?

Speaker 4 ([13:12](#)):

It was a huge relief. Oh my goodness. I can't even tell you <laugh>. Yeah. So it, it was a huge relief when, um, it was transferred to my coworker. Recognizing that we're all different. Um, and it's not a one size fit all, but getting to know the people that you supervise, like what drives them? What makes them tick, what sets them off? What are they made of that? That helped in supervision. Yeah

Speaker 3 ([13:46](#)):

Families change daily. And you need that support from a supervisor to like I'll just say for me to guide me, um, if I am, um, talking about a case and I'm too broad, my supervisor will narrow it down and say, well, let's talk about this issue first. And then yes. Okay. I can do that. Because I'm in the case, and right now I'm in investigation. So let's say I've interviewed multiple people. And I have a lot of narrative and stories in my head when I'm talking to my supervisor, she can kind of hone down on certain things that I've discussed or if she read my case notes, you know, well, you mentioned this, you know, did you follow up with that statement or whatever? She also helps me. The supervisor also helps a worker to

stay focused, which, like I said, sometimes if I'm talking too broad, um, that she'll bring me back in. Also, if I'm saying too many what ifs, and I've heard this, especially in the beginning of my investigation career, she'll say we can't go on what ifs. And she just says, you know, you need to focus on, um, the allegation and what the problem is, and then move on. Because if we keep going on what ifs we'll never close cases.

Speaker 5 ([15:14](#)):

For me. And this is like this is my personal belief and my personal style. So this isn't me like saying what all supervisors should be doing, but I, I think containment and structure are so important and containment, I don't mean that just like emotionally, but just giving some known structure to here is what to expect, here is what I'm gonna need you to do here, are your next steps. Um, cause I kind of view being in social services or being in child welfare as like being in a constant state of informed consent that every day you have to give your informed consent to, can I do this? Um, and the, the only way you can really do that is if you fully understand what it is you're signing up for.

Speaker 2 ([15:55](#)):

My dream is that the supervisor is like calm and cool and collected <laugh>. I don't think that's always the case because they're under a lot of pressure, way too much pressure. But that's, you know, that's kind of what I'm looking at is like, what's helped me is when I've been able to go to a supervisor and they've been able to say, Hey, have you thought of this? You know, you seem like you're getting triggered by this, you know, or whatever it is. And, with a caring and helpful way. And also just the knowledge piece. I mean, these are incredibly complicated. The work is incredibly complicated, so to keep reminding us, Hey, you might have you learned about this at school. Let's bring this back up. There's some new research on such and such. Let's bring this back up.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([16:46](#)):

Part of the rationale for why supervision and supervisors are so critical is not to just surveil and manage the work though. We'll touch on this a bit more in a minute, but also that having this time built into how services are delivered will ensure high quality, ethical social work practice in child welfare services. So I was curious about practitioners' perspectives on what supervisees need; from their supervisor or in supervision in order to do high quality work.

Speaker 2 ([17:19](#)):

As someone from a line staff perspective. I will say that I really, when I get negative feedback, there's times I've been like, oh, really wounded. Like I can't believe, oh, my colleague thought that that's makes me sad. I didn't mean it like that or whatever, but you know, what what's really made all the difference is that my supervisor has been there with me and I've, you know, felt like I could be myself. And I felt like she saw my strengths and could tell me all right, what were the circumstances in this situation? And what do you think about that? And what do you, you know, and can kinda work you through, you know, so that I can pull around to, you know, what, next time I'm gonna remember to do A, B and C, because I think I intended to do that step and I didn't and you know, I don't know. So it's just, you know, that assuming good intentions, helping somebody grow, knowing that one piece of feedback, isn't your whole self isn't your whole career, you know, and then moving forward from it,

Speaker 3 ([18:22](#)):

Like she has boundaries. And so I don't cross those boundaries, but that I know that she's there and can help when she can and she'll even reach out and say, do you need help with something? Or I understand this case is kind of sloppy. Do you need another worker to go out with you? And maybe like, she kind of knows some of the cases that give me problems, and will check in with me or after you meet with the kids or this family, you know, me so we can chat. If there's something she doesn't know, she will write it down, find out and let the whole unit know or myself. And I really like that, that she, um, she does that for us. And that's helpful.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([19:04](#)):

That she sort of follows up to answer questions, but also is it that she can acknowledge when she doesn't know something? Or is it that she also,

Speaker 3 ([19:12](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. And I do that with my client, with the families. Uh, I work with all the time. I don't know the answer to that. I will have to talk to my supervisor and I'm upfront with people, or I thought we got an email on that, but I'm not quite sure I don't wanna give you wrong information. And it just shows that we're human. And honestly, there, there are so much to know and learn that not one person can remember everything or who to talk to or email or call, or is there a use form or

Speaker 2 ([19:40](#)):

<laugh>, you know, I've had some amazing supervisors that just have that really confidence and that ego strength that, that they're healthy people themselves, mentally healthy, together people themselves. And so that helps them going into a relationship. They're, they're able to give advice and guide with confidence because they have, you know, experience, but they're also comfortable being and being, um, and making mistakes and owning up to those mistakes, you know, and not feeling like they always have to know every answer. But you know, coming back and, you know, so it's that kind of, for me, I think about what a supervisee needs is that supervisor who's confident, but humble, knowledgeable, but willing to learn, you know what I'm saying? Like just that balance and, can, as the supervisee perspective can really protect the staff as much as they can so that they can do their best work. I guess, like one of the quotes my supervisor used to say, and I'm quoting a supervisor here is her job was to remove barriers so that we could do our best work.

Speaker 3 ([20:53](#)):

It helps that she was an investigator for many years and she is knowledgeable. It helps that she keeps us updated on the different changes in child welfare practice with our county and then federal and state, regulation, statutes, and laws. And honestly, there's so much to know and learn that not one person can remember everything or who to talk to or email or call, or is there a use form or <laugh>. So, yeah,

Mimi Choy-Brown ([21:28](#)):

These voices from the field also highlighted the role of supervisors outside of supervision, as a leader of their teams, the role of the team was shared as critical. And the supervisors role as the leader of that team was a key one. Let's hear what they had to share with us about supervisors as team leaders, too.

Speaker 2 ([21:49](#)):

The supervisor is also the lead of a team, and they create that team culture for the, for the unit that you work with. And having that done well is really, really crucial and important to this work. Because especially now more than ever, we need each other to do this work well. And I feel like that supervisor being able to build a team culture where people are safe, where they can ask questions, where they can be themselves, where they can laugh, where we can actually take a break and laugh together and, um, share, you know, share a little bit of each other's lives, but then come back to our shared mission and really know we have a place we belong on this team. We're valued. We are important and we have an important work to do. And I just feel like that supervisor has a lot of, I mean, they can't control every person on the team, right. But they can set a culture, they can set an expectation for a culture, and they can model that. And that for me has been huge.

Speaker 3 ([23:06](#)):

We map a case and we have of the presenter, the person taking notes, a person looking up stuff, and then everybody else is listening, observing, and commenting. And what I like about that is at the end, if it's something like, do we have to make a maltreatment finding somebody will either look up the statute to see if it meets the statute, you know, what are their thoughts? Yes. Or no, and why, or if we close the case, move the case along, you know, what are some other things that we can do? I like that because it gets everybody else's experience and ideas into the helping with the case and moving it forward. But I think if a supervisor comes into child welfare who has never done the work, I think they're gonna have a difficult time. Cuz you're not gonna be able to relate to your workers, their stress or struggle

Mimi Choy-Brown ([24:05](#)):

In this next section. I ask the supervisors how they learn to become a supervisor, which is an area of growing interest of mine. I'm curious about how our systems are preparing supervisors and what areas of need for support there are out there. So let's listen to our supervisors.

Speaker 4 ([24:24](#)):

I've learned from my former supervisor, she was a great, great role model. And there's courses, there's, you know, all these learning things, but I think that we learned most, or maybe I should speak for myself. I learn better when, I'm doing something and I'm looking at an example, like I had a supervisor that was living, breathing, walking, good example of what a good supervisor should be or what I as a worker looked for in a supervisor. And that has led me to the path to be that supervisor that I saw, that supervisor, that I felt cared about me was a good leader. Encouraged me, was open to my suggestions, allowed me to make decisions essentially, you know, weigh in, but also allowing me to take the leap. And that's how that's mostly where I learned from,

Speaker 5 ([25:41](#)):

You know, I took my courses at the U of M and like, you know, read the books, all that kind of stuff. And you do get bits and pieces of helpful things there. But I think mainly you learn the same way you learn everything in social work, which is on your feet. You just gotta do it. There's no nothing else that replaces that. You just have to get out there and do it

Mimi Choy-Brown ([26:02](#)):

Next, in my work, I've been really interested in this tension within supervision of both oversight of the kind of clinical care and the administrative management of staff members. As well as the support for staff in this difficult work. I'm so curious about how supervisors navigate this tension and how

supervisees experience it. These practitioners did not disappoint in sharing their thoughtful perspectives on the question, is supervision surveillance or support?

Speaker 4 ([26:34](#)):

There's the support side. But there's also that side about, I would say, watching over the people that you supervise, because people make mistakes, people forget, people think they've done something and they haven't. And so as a supervisor, that's part of your job. So it's a little bit of, I, I guess, I don't know, maybe kind of like a Watchman sort of in a good way. You know, like you watch over them, you know, that, um, they're doing the best they can mm-hmm <affirmative> but people are humans. They, you know, there are tasks that need to be completed. So making sure that there's a balance, I think one is knowing the people that you supervise, that you supervise knowing them individually, not just as workers, but as whether are their moms or dads or grandmas, like wherever they are in life, you know, that impacts how, how they work, right. How they behave. So knowing them, knowing that person as an individual is something that really helps. Cause one person is, you know, one person could be like totally talkative. The other person could be very quiet, but like knowing them and being able to read their body language, their cues, that sort of thing, so that you are able to use that and in that space and create an environment where they feel they're valued and they know that they'll listen to someone is willing to listen to them.

Speaker 3 ([28:29](#)):

I think it's both, in surveillance in a good way, as far as my experience, we have so many things to click on things we have to do in a timely manner, that it helps if she says, can you please go in and do a safety assessment? Oh, shoot. I forgot to do that. Yeah. Thanks. When you get a case there's like so many things you have to do. And so sometimes after I see a kid, I don't go in and do the safety assessment 24 hours after seeing them. And so I don't see it as a negative. My supervisor isn't a micromanager. So when she does say things, I'm like, oh yeah, I know I should have known that or I should have done that. Yep. Sorry. Um, but also if I'm stuck on something or it's a difficult case, or say like as a case in the news, if she read my case notes, you know, yeah, please do I wanna make sure everything is correct because attorneys are gonna get it.

Speaker 3 ([29:33](#)):

And you know, maybe the news people will get it too. So I want my case notes, you know, precise and non-judging and to the point and, you know, factual. So I don't see it as a negative. Um, and then with support that's, you know, just that's what I usually get. Because I get to a point where I just tell her, okay, this is what I wanna do next steps. You know, what do you think? And then just talk her through the case. There's some cases where I'm stuck and I'm just like, don't tell me, Jamie, what would you do? Cause that's not gonna work. Cause that's why I'm coming to you. And I'll tell her that. I think a lot of the supervisors that I met and then coworkers and friends probably say that their advisor is a little bit more open, but we all, a lot of us know the ones that aren't, and who are a little bit more rigid.

Speaker 3 ([30:30](#)):

And you just kind of know that that's not somebody who I would interview with. But like for instance, today I had four phone calls and then it took me like 20 minutes to put that all on the computer. And then in the meantime, maybe somebody's emailing or chiming in or texting me or calling me, and then I'm off to something else. So sometimes that can be anxiety ridden. There are supervisors who will pull reports on your cases. And during supervision will tell you everything that is not done. That's not really

helpful. We know things need to be done, especially in investigations, and things often move fast. And then sometimes they're a little slower, but I think that would give me high anxiety.

Speaker 5 ([31:25](#)):

I try to put those two things together that the surveillance is part of the support that the surveillance is, let me teach you how to do this dance of, getting the admin done, getting through the bread tape that allows you to provide the support that allows you to do the work that really fuels you, that you wanna do. It needs to be high quality work. We need to be able to a trust that you are doing work. We don't have to surveil.

Speaker 2 ([31:46](#)):

I think this is so important and it's complicated. I've heard the word surveillance, but for me, what I feel like it needs to be is about accountability, you know. I personally feel like what I need as a line staff is I need somebody who can really see my strengths. I mean, this is what I've really valued is somebody who can see my strengths, see where, what I'm best at, and then appreciate that about me. Right? Like, appreciate that I usually like to spend more time with my clients and not as much time on documentation <laugh> because that's where my values are, but then nudge me. Right, nudge me like there, we all need those nudges. And I think for me, one of the things I really believe, I believe that supervision is a two-way street. I believe the supervisor, it's super important for them to get to know their staff and to see the good in their staff and to remind them of the good and to help them see the good in themselves.

Speaker 2 ([32:59](#)):

But then on top of that, like to be able to nudge in, you know, support and constructive criticism, you know to be able to say it and do it in a way that shows the employee, that they're not trying to, that they're trying to help them and that they're trying to support them and that they still see all the other good stuff that they're doing. Because as we know, it's hard to get feedback. It's hard for people to get feedback and it's hard for us to feel, feel like that our work is being looked at and scrutinized, but we need that. We all need that. And if you think of, I'm really looking at the relationship and the parallel process. So I work a lot with child protection, right? So you're a child protection worker and you're meeting with a parent on your caseload.

Speaker 2 ([33:51](#)):

You want to be able to see their strengths of this, of this parent, of this, you know, of this mom or dad, you wanna be able to see what's good in them. You wanna be able to encourage them. You wanna be able to inspire them, to keep doing the hard work of whatever it is, their work that needs to be done to keep parenting. And, and yet at the same time, you need to be able to nudge them. You need to be able to be compassionate, but to be able to nudge them with, you know, accountability, you know, you need to keep doing ABC because we need you, your kids need you need a sober, we need a sober parent. We need a strong, healthy parent, whatever that is. I really see a parallel process here with supervisor to employee. I know it's different. I'm not trying to say that, you know. But I know it's different, but there's a relationship. There's a power dynamic and employees need someone who values them and sees them and sees the good work, but can also nudge can also push.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([34:56](#)):

As we just heard, supervisors and supervision can be an opportunity for constructive feedback and reflection really slowing down those quick thoughts and reflecting on our bias and our assessments and the decisions we've made in our work. Because of this potential for supervision time to provide this kind of individualized feedback and kind of safeguard the space in our weeks or in our days to reflect on our work. I was really curious to ask our practitioners about this potential for supervision, to help the child welfare system and services to integrate practice using an anti-oppressive and anti-racist lens.

Speaker 4 ([35:39](#)):

I think a lot of people have always had in the back of their minds, anti-racist practice, but everything that has happened in Minneapolis and maybe even the US and the world, particularly within the last year has just proven that there's still work, that needs to be done. And there's always ongoing discussion, ongoing conversation of how we could do better, how we could serve families better and how we could look through culturally responsive lens, better for the families that we serve. And so constantly I would say bringing that forward the fact that we need to recognize that families struggle and in part, sometimes families are treated differently based on their ethnicity or their race. But I think we in child welfare are making progress. There's still ways to go, but I think we've made some good progress, tweaking services looking to more culturally responsive providers and that sort of thing to meet the needs of the families that we serve when we have these

Speaker 4 ([37:13](#)):

for example, frameworks, we commit to talking about the, speaking about the families as if they're present, recognizing that families, when we meet them, they are in chaos. That doesn't mean that they will never get out of chaos. Encouraging workers to not be judgmental. And I don't, for the most part, I think sometimes it's not intentional, but we have to come from a place of humility. We don't know anything more about the family than what we've read in a report, and that that's not, that's not the family; they're in chaos. But you know, so encouraging workers to be open-minded to engage the family as if the family is the, they are the experts. I always tell families, you guys are the experts for your family. Not me, we're just supporting you, but you are the expert So in supervision, really encouraging workers to not place families in a box, not place them in one category just because of the ethnicity or the race, but being open minded.

Speaker 3 ([38:40](#)):

We have our, you know, our mission, but it's also to help and work with families. And that's important to like put our own biases aside, and work with the families. So we can't treat families the same. And supervision, like my supervisor knows that, she understands that when we talk about the families, especially in group supervision, that we talk like they're right there with us sitting with us while we're talking about them. But being respectful and kind. And I think if somebody said something inappropriate that it's a supervisor's job to say something to that person, either take them aside, if it was a group supervision or in group supervision. Or if you see other people thinking or showing that that wasn't appropriate, that's, that supervisor's job to say something to change, a good supervisor will nip that in the butt with a worker

Speaker 3 ([39:41](#)):

if it seems like it's going to be racist, or maybe you're just not the person for this case. And we've had to swap cases before, if a person's not getting through with a family we've, you know, had to swap cases, which is good. And the supervisor can see that. Or if me, as a worker said, this isn't working out, I can't

continue to work with this family. Then I might switch with another worker. There's been a couple people who have said inappropriate things like in group supervision or in our unit meetings. And I know my supervisor said something, and I think a couple of us would, would say something too. And it's just to make sure you're on a level that you're the worker and you're the expert, but that these people have rights and feelings and are doing the best that they can.

Speaker 2 ([40:35](#)):

I am certainly not an expert, you know, as a white woman who grew up in Minnesota with a ton of white privilege, I'm trying to, you know, we're trying to, I'm trying to do my work. You know, I hope the white supervisors out there and the white line staff are all working on doing their work. We all need to do our work and keep trying to do our work and helping people tune into what's going on with their bias when they can be calm, when they can be, when they can really be, you know, reach down to their best thinking, because they're feeling, you know, supported and safe and they're in their present moment, right. We can do deeper work. And so I feel like that's where a supervisor comes in. If your staff can't do that deeper work, and they're reactionary, something's wrong. And we need to keep screaming about it until things get better. I don't know. I don't have all the answers. But I know we have a long ways to go. And I'm hopeful.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([41:50](#)):

Lastly, as I've asked all the guests on this podcast, I wanted to hear from practitioners about their dreams for supervision.

Speaker 4 ([42:00](#)):

I think that some people need more time. Just having that time, that space where there's no distractions, there's no looking at the clock, watching, wanting to get done, because you know, there's other things to do. So having that space and allowing that supervisee to say what they wanna say at their own pace. And I have to hurry them to get along to the next thing, because we're limited by time. I think that as a supervisee, if you're not, if your needs are not getting met, if there's things you really need to talk about, but you think that there's not enough time or your supervisor is busy. I think you should bring those things out. If there are things going on in your life personally, and you don't have to be super detailed, but let your supervisor know that. Be open, be authentic, be vulnerable and let them know, hey, I'm in a hard time. I have a lot of stuff going on, like be open about what's going on about you. Cause if they don't know, they're not gonna be able to support you in that way.

Speaker 3 ([43:23](#)):

Oh, that's yeah. My dream <laugh> <laugh> that my supervisor will always say I'm doing everything right? No, <laugh> you know, a good supervisor would, would set the stage for case work, practice and evidence-based practice. And that's, that's the key to working in child welfare. And that's what we have to, you know, like go on. I also, my personal, I like group supervision. Again, you get different information, knowledge, things I didn't know we had, or somebody else experienced something and we're all writing down the email or, you know, the phone number to that person. That's helpful. Also supervisors who are participating in trainings, not just our county trainings, but also like evidence-based practice trainings or trainings like at M Health. A supervisor also sets a tone for a healthy work environment. As a supervisor, you have to be, you have to have like an open door policy and to be readily available as can be, as you can be, to help your worker.

Speaker 3 ([44:35](#)):

A lot of times we have crises and or there's something going on in the field, or you have to call the police, or you have to remove kids now. You know, if you're trying to get ahold of your supervisor and it's during day hours and you're like, oh I thought they were still supposed to be there, you know, that's, you know, my supervisor will say, I'm here. I have a meeting, I have a personal appointment. So she kind of gives us, but she says, you know, I'm available on text. So if I text her, she goes, okay, do you need me to call you? I can leave this meeting. I'm like, yes or no, but you know, our safety is important out here, meeting with families. And lot of us, some of us have come across some dangerous situations. And the supervisor is there for to talk with us and to get us through that talk about secondary trauma. Talk about our boundaries. Not only with clients, but with work. I tell new people at the end of the day, if it's during the week, I put my phone on vibrate and I flip it over. I'm done.

Speaker 5 ([45:38](#)):

More supervision of myself. I would say, I often feel like I'm making it up, like trying to figure out what is good supervision and also balance. What is, what do we need on our cases? And what is the expectation for how much case supervision I'm doing versus person supervision? Like, do, are we expecting I'm gonna develop people or are we just expecting the cases are gonna be at a baseline? Like what, what am I actually supposed to be doing?

Speaker 2 ([46:02](#)):

My big dream is that in child welfare, we come to a point where we come to a time when caseloads are manageable enough that people feel like they can do their work, that they can do good work, and that they have the resources they need for families, you know, over and over again. I feel like supervisors are, and supervisees are stuck with these really, really tricky situations where supervisors are being pushed to check that all this work is done from, by their line staff, that their court reports are in on time and that they've done this form and that form and you know, so much. And really my dream is that we bring it back to relationship. And we remember that, you know, when we're talking about keeping kids with family, doing our very best to reunify and keep kids with their family or prevent any, you know, harm to kids in the first place, that means we need relationships, we need support.

Speaker 2 ([47:13](#)):

We need people to not be isolated. We need strong, you know, healthy people to be able to go out and do that work. I mean, my dream is that we have wonderful supervisors out there that I know we have. My dream is that they can do the work that they're good at. And that line staff can do the work that they're good at, when the incredible pressure is off a little bit. You know, cuz I feel like that is what creates so many problems in supervisor relationship is that there's not enough time for people to do their, their best work. And there's not enough resources for the families so that, you know, there's this constant scarcity and that feeling is so heavy.

Mimi Choy-Brown ([48:04](#)):

I'm so grateful to these four voices from the field sharing with us their experiences of clinical supervision today, why it matters for their work and their dreams for what supervision can be in child welfare. I hope we were able to convey their awesome commitment and hope for youth and families. The message was hopeful yet challenged by limited time and resources to their best work. Supervision is a critical already embedded time that can be used to support practitioners and cultivate support amongst team members. I want to thank these four practitioners for taking the time to share their thoughts as

well as all of my guests in the last four episodes. And I'm particularly grateful given the reality that these were all recorded during the COVID 19 pandemic. This concludes the fourth episode of The Heart of Supervision podcast. And the primary aim has been to elevate a dialogue about what supervision is, what it could be and why it matters for child welfare. I hope that you've enjoyed it and found something to bring to your work. I've had a ton of fun working on them and learning so much from the conversations with all of my fantastic guests. Thank you all for listening in and for all of your work for youth and families. Again, I'm Mimi Choy-Brown and you can reach me at mchoybro@umn.edu. If you have any feedback, questions or comments, please feel free to reach out to me at my email address. I'd love to hear from you take care.

Funding Statement ([49:43](#)):

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