

Supervising online

Supervising online has always been possible, and sometimes desirable, in a wide range of circumstances. Covid-19 led to most, if not all, supervision moving quickly to online formats, and reflective practitioners found advantages and disadvantages to this new mode of working.

While many have embraced the idea of supervision online, some have questioned its effectiveness when using approaches to supervision other than talking. However, experience shows that many of the alternative techniques work well and are easily adaptable from their in-situ formats.

If you are approaching supervision online for the first time, you may want to pay attention to a few key factors:

- Which technology you will use (Zoom/Microsoft Teams/Skype, etc)
- How the technology works and who will contact whom
- The contact details needed
- What to do if the preferred method fails
- The implications for boundaries and confidentiality when two geographical locations are involved, eg Who else is in the house and might overhear? Is there a risk of interruption?
- The implications for preparation beforehand and processing afterwards. How will you carve out the time to do that thinking and praying or to look back at records?
- What it feels like to engage in a virtual space
- The implications for the supervisory methods that can be used and what resources both parties might need around them
- How you will complete, share and sign the Agreed Record. You may need to agree an electronic signature format or make the point of noting that it has been agreed online

Think about creating good space for supervision

If you are the supervisor

- Try to organise your room so that the technology you use (phone, tablet or laptop) is not on your desk but in a space suitable for reflection. Think about the backdrop that your supervisee will see. What do you not want them to see? Try to send the kind of spatial signals for containing supervisory work that you would aim to create if you were sharing the space.
- Think about the nature of virtual space. Do you use electronic means for other meetings (business, keeping in touch with family). How is this similar/different? How will prayer be like this? You may be seeing into your supervisee's home for the first time. What is that like for them? Many people assume that online supervision is less intimate, but in some ways it can be more exposing.

- Think ahead about what you need for the whole supervisory process. Have you got your diary to hand for confirming future dates? Copies of the paperwork you need to complete? Any paper/pens for notes? It is more disconcerting to move away from the camera during online supervision than it is to move about the supervision room when you are face to face, so how will you allay any anxieties about that?
- Ask yourself what is absolutely necessary for you to see and what is important for the supervisee to see. You may, for example, only see the end-result of a picture that has been drawn – and that might be enough.

If you are the supervisee

- Think about your physical space: where is the best place to receive supervision? Ideally, not at your desk, where it will be hard to get perspective from your work or for deep feelings to emerge. If it has to be there, try to put papers to one side and switch off your email. Try to create a space with a reflective feel. Do you want a candle or religious symbol around you?
- What digital device can you use? It needs a camera and a microphone. Laptops/desktops might be the easiest for this purpose, but tablets and phones can work. How can you enable your supervisee to see things if you chose to draw, map or use objects? Can you adjust your angle of view to, for example, show the space at the front of you or at the side of you?
- Think about the nature of virtual space. Do you use electronic means for other meetings (business, keeping in touch with family)? How is this similar/different? How will prayer be, shared in this medium? You may be seeing into your supervisor's home for the first time. What will that be like? Many people assume that online supervision is less intimate, but in some ways it can be more exposing.
- Think through the boundaries you need to put in place to be able to concentrate and keep the space confidential. Family members, pets, etc, may all need clear guidance!
- The quality of space made available for supervision includes the mental and emotional space you create before and after, for distilling and processing. Think about how to manage your time so that you create mental and emotional room to consider and reflect in depth. If you would normally travel to your supervision, then allow yourself that time for thinking. You might want to go for a short walk beforehand or afterwards.
- Consider what you have within your ministry toolkit that might be useful in supervision. Do you use images or art as part of your ministry life? Are there devotional materials that you draw on? Do you have cloths or materials that you use to create worship spaces? All these may be of use and you will probably get a feel for what you need as your experience grows.

Using the online space well

- Angle of view: It is helpful if the supervisor can see more of the supervisee than their head. It makes more intuitive communication possible if you can see hand gestures and body posture. You might want to encourage your supervisee to identify a suitable table, shelf or music stand that they can put their device on so that they can sit back in their chair? If you are using creative methods, you will need to see what your supervisee creates. If it's drawing, they can draw and then hold it up to the screen. If it's 'small

world' or image cards (see below), they will need to angle their screen so you can see the action. It will take some experimentation to get it right, but it's usually worth the trouble.

- **Keeping track:** It can be hard for supervisors to track supervisory conversations if they are entirely verbal. Great concentration is needed in virtual communication to do this. It is likely to be important for you to keep notes. If you are a visual thinker, you may want to draw what you are hearing. Some people find it helpful to draw what a supervisee is describing and then check back with them as a form of tracking and monitoring. Often note-taking feels less intrusive online than when together in the same space.
- **Creative/alternative methods** can be used effectively through a screen, but they may need adapting. The most important difference is that the supervisee needs to have the necessary kit available (rather than you). Please make sure that they at least have pens and paper to hand. If you have not yet tried 'small world', cards or 'chair work' with them, this may be the moment to try, so encourage them to equip themselves with a basic kit. Evoke cards can be ordered from www.amazon.co.uk. Objects can be gathered from a toybox, toolbox or kitchen draw. Cloths can be sheets, towels, even jackets, as long as they offer some choices of colour and texture.

Using different approaches online

- The document *Matching Methods to Supervisory Questions*,ⁱ explains which methods work best with which kinds of questions. There is also some advice in *Matching Methods*,ⁱⁱ the developmental videos that form part of this course.
- Once a method is agreed, think about how you may have to adapt to use it in an online space.
- **Cards/'small world':**
 - Ask your supervisee to angle their screen onto the surface in front of them, so that you can see the whole scene or as much of it as possible.
 - If you cannot see well, ask the supervisee to hold up each object and show you as they tell you its meaning.
 - While the screen is on the objects/cards, it keeps your focus there too and you will get the best from the method.
 - More difficult is that you won't be able to see the supervisee's facial expressions or where their eye is landing, which can often be good clues to what they are processing or feeling. You may have to compensate for that by asking additional questions.
 - When it is time to de-role, ask the supervisee to do this and then to angle the screen back onto themselves so you can start bridging and enacting before you review and close.

ⁱ This can be found at www.methodist.org.uk/media/16495/matching-methods-to-supervisory-questions.pdf

ⁱⁱ These can be found on YouTube: Matching Methods 1, 2, 3.

• What are creative methods? (29:10): www.youtube.com/watch?v=T_FPFpJEJ48

• Matching methods to questions (1:08:52): www.youtube.com/watch?v=8CavsPvtDTo

• Further ideas and resources (20:08): www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfFZ1eMmO9Q

- Role work:
 - Ask your supervisee to let you see as much of the whole space as possible.
 - Many supervisees will not have much space to work in or may lack additional chairs to mark the roles/options they want to explore. If this is the case, ask them to choose a cloth and show you it before they stand on it and start to experience what this role/option feels like. Alternatively, they could wear the cloth/jacket and experience the role/option that way. Remember to follow the protocol and slow the action down, inviting the supervisee to say what it feels like in each space/role, what their questions are in this role/space, what the wisdom is in this space, etc. Hats or scarves often work for this too.
 - If the supervisee has the space to use chairs but not the technology to let you see the action, you will need to get them to describe what they are doing. Again, slow down the action by asking them questions so that the supervisee feels accompanied and not left to work it out on their own.
 - In either case, remember to ask them to de-role and then angle the screen back to themselves to debrief.
- Drawing exercises
 - Invite the supervisee to draw/map out what they are describing. They can do this using pens and paper but, if they are familiar with its use, could also use the whiteboard on Zoom.
 - They may want to use metaphor. For example, can they draw a person or situation as a building, object or landscape?
 - They may want to do a mind map or list different aspects of the situation.
 - They may want to draw their feelings about a situation or person, in connection to their supervisory question.
 - Invite your supervisee to review their work and share it with you. Which spaces seem most enlightening? What do they notice/wonder/realise? What do you notice/wonder?
 - Ask them what they want to do with their drawing. If they have used the Zoom whiteboard, ask if they need to retain a copy of the image they have created.

There are many more ways you can use online approaches, and in time you might want to attend the development module related to the topic 'What's good about online supervision?' or 'Creative methods in supervision'.