

## Offering supervision whilst social distancing/self-isolating

This document is designed to support supervisors who are offering supervision under the Methodist Church Supervision Policy whilst restrictions on social contact are in place. It comprises 3 sections:

- 1 The value of supervision in a time of change and stress
- 2 The restorative, formative and normative dimensions of supervision as they are impacted by Covid-19
- 3 Notes on offering tele-supervision

### 1 The Value of Supervision in a time of change and stress

Supervision in the Methodist church context has already been demonstrated to reduce symptoms of stress and isolation, to help ministers prioritise and devise new strategies for new situations, and to engage with risk assessment. In the recent survey conducted by the connexional team:

- 76% reported that supervision had helped them feel significantly more connected to God/vocation
- 74% reported that supervision had made a significant impact on their wellbeing
- 68% reported that supervision had made a significant impact on helping them use their time more intentionally
- 68% that supervision had helped them manage risk significantly more effectively

The coming weeks are going to create stresses for everyone and for those in ministry these will manifest themselves in particular ways. Supervision needs to continue to be attentive to restorative, formative and normative dimensions.

### 2a Restorative supervision whilst social distancing/self-isolating

- 1 Social distancing/self-isolation is disorienting. Although in the short term reduced activity may enable some welcome rest, for most ministers the loss of the usual routine of social contact and meaningful activity will also create some stress. They may have time and space to consider deeper questions of vocation and identity that the usual busy routine obscures. They may also encounter our own deep faith questions stimulated by the current situation or that surface when we do not have access to the usual means of grace.

**Please ensure that your supervisees have permission to explore the impact of self-isolation on faith, vocation, identity and meaning during this time.**

- 2 The balance of ministers' work is likely to be very different in the coming weeks. Whereas pastoral ministry normally involves contact with people at all stages of life and who are engaging in a variety of different ways, in these weeks ministerial work is likely to be heavily pastoral and focused on issues created by Covid 19 or exacerbated by it. Ministers may find themselves dealing with a good deal of anxiety in others that leaves its mark on them; they may find themselves predominantly dealing with people who are bereaved and afraid; they may find that funeral work assumes a higher profile in their work, either because they are handling more funerals, or because this becomes one of the few gatherings at which they now preside. They may find themselves distressed because they cannot offer the kind of care that they are used to offering face to face or because work in which they have been investing is paused or maybe lost.

**Please be aware of the changed pastoral context of this time and of its potential demand on your supervisees.**

- 3 Supervisees are all likely to have personal anxieties about family members, and perhaps about their own health. Some concerns will be directly related to the virus and others related to its impact upon jobs, children's exams, and responsibilities for elderly parents and neighbours. Practical concerns about children's education, sourcing basic supplies and medicines and monitoring health may be overwhelming supervisees at the same time as those for whom they care pastorally are raising all the same issues. They may feel responsible for many things and people whose circumstances they cannot change.

**Please ensure that you are processing your own anxieties so that you can be a non-anxious presence to your supervisees. Remember that parallel process may be a feature of supervision as we all adjust to new realities and process fears and impotence.**

## **2b Formative supervision whilst social distancing/self-isolating**

- 1 Although some ministers work from home already, for many their working/living circumstances may have changed. Family members are at home when they normally are at school or working elsewhere. Ministers may be struggling to concentrate in a new working environment. They may be distracted by interruptions or constant notifications with Covid-19 updates. They may not have the team support they are used to.

**Please help supervisees to review their working patterns find new strategies for a changed situation.**

- 2 The current situation is already stimulating theological reflection. With so much of our taken-for-granted life suspended, what might God be saying to the world, to the global north, to the church, and to my community, at this point? Supervision provides a space for thinking broadly and deeply and the current hiatus in activity may also allow space for longer term thinking and preparations to be made for a new phase of ministry/church to emerge. Amongst the challenges, some new energy, direction and creativity might be released that

will help shape the future in unexpected ways.

**Please help your supervisees step back and, when appropriate, encourage them to think creatively about how to respond to what God might be saying and doing in this peculiar season.**

- 3 Covid-19 and the associated restrictions are creating all kinds of challenges for the ways in which ministry is normally exercised. Supervisees may feel inadequate to face the challenges and lacking in the particular skills needed, e.g. the use of technology. However, the current situation does create opportunities for learning new ways of working and for engaging different skills amongst teams to help solve the problems being faced. There may even be time for engaging in some reading or formal study online in order to equip ministers for the future. Evidence suggests that learning supports mental health at work.

**Please support your supervisees in identifying their learning needs and ways of meeting them, and in reflecting on what the Church can learn from this season.**

## **2c Normative supervision whilst social distancing/self-isolating**

- 1 Guidance about Covid-19 is constantly being issued and updated for the churches, social projects and educational institutions we are involved in that is relevant to our work. The Methodist Church is regularly updating its website page here: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/coronavirus/>. **There is particular safeguarding guidance for this situation that has been added.**

**Supervision is a context for sharing the task of complex risk assessment. Please ensure that your supervisees are paying attention to the new risks and to new guidance.**

- 2 Whilst supervision face to face is not currently prohibited, government advice is to work from home if at all possible. Supervision is work that can be done from home and now is a good time to prepare for/start using supervising using electronic means. Although this may be a new experience, and not your preference, research suggests that tele-supervision can be just as helpful as supervision face to face. Some guidance for making good use of tele-supervision is offered below.

**Supervision can work effectively using electronic means if both parties are prepared to engage. Please ensure that you are prepared and that your supervisees are informed and ready to engage online or by phone.**

- 3 The Supervision Policy is not suspended during this time. In fact the provision of supervision may be even more vital now as a prudential means of grace for keeping the body of Christ connected at a deep level. Of course, you may be ill, or your supervisor may fall ill and need to cancel an appointment. Please, wherever possible, communicate with your supervisor if you do need to cancel an appointment and so that they can pray for you. Your supervisor is being asked to do the same and those with implementation responsibility are being asked to keep a close eye on implementation plans to ensure that supervision is made available as

reliably as possible during this fragile time.

**Supervision is part of the normative way in which the Methodist Church now connects those in ministry. Please stay in touch with your supervisor.**

### **3 Notes on tele-supervision**

#### **1 Covenanting or Re-covenanting:**

If tele-supervision is new to a supervisory relationship please make this an explicit part of the Supervision Covenant between you. Make sure you discuss:

- Which technology you will use (zoom is recommended).
- 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 (see below)
- The implications for preparation beforehand and processing afterwards when there is no travelling involved (see below)
- What it feels like to engage in a virtual space (see below)
- The implications for the supervisory methods that can be used (creative methods are still possible but need adapting – see below)
- How you will complete, share and sign the Agreed Record

#### **B Creating the Space**

**Supervisor:**

- Try to organise your room so that the technology you use (phone, tablet or laptop) is not on your desk but in a suitably reflective space. 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 tele-supervision is less intimate but it can be more exposing in some ways.
- 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 tele-supervision than it is to move about the supervision room when you are face to face.

## Supervisee:

- Think about your space – where can you best receive supervision? Ideally, not at your desk, as this will be full of work and not easily allow perspective on the work or deep feelings to emerge. Try to identify a space with a more reflective feel. Do you want a candle or religious symbol visible at your end?
- What device can you use? It needs a camera and a microphone. Tablets and phones are the easiest for this purpose, but a laptop or desktop can work.
- 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 supervisor's home for the first time. What will that be like? Many people assume that tele-supervision is less intimate but it can be more exposing in some ways.
- Think through the boundaries you need to put in place in order to concentrate and keep the space confidential. Family members, pets etc.. may all need clear guidance!
- The quality of space available for supervision also concerns the mental and emotional space created before and after supervision for distilling and processing what has taken place. Think about how to manage your diary before and after the 90 minutes of the supervision so you are not cramming it into such a small space that you do not have the mental and emotional room to reflect at depth.

## C Using the 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're your supervisee identify a suitable table or shelf 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 its drawing they can draw and then hold it up to the screen. If it's small world or cards 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 need to draw what you are hearing. Sometimes sharing this with the supervisee on the screen can help them see what they are saying.
- **Creative 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 ready. 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 [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk). Objects can be gathered from a toy box, tool box or kitchen draw. Cloths can be sheets, towels, even jackets, as long as they offer some choices of colour and texture. It may

encourage you to try supervisory methods if you understand better how they are most effectively used. The document: *Matching Methods to Supervisory Questions*, explains which methods work best with which questions. You should also revise the relevant section of Responsible Grace. Notes on particular methods as they are used in tele-supervision are offered here:

### **Tele-supervision using Cards/Small World**

- Focus the question as usual
- When you have agreed how to work, ask your supervisee to angle their screen onto the surface you will use so you can see the whole scene.
- If you cannot see well, ask the supervisee to hold up each object and show you as they tell you its meaning.
- The good thing is that whilst the screen is on the objects/cards, it keeps your focus there too so that you get the bets from the method.
- When it is time to de-role, ask the supervisee to do this and then angle the screen back onto them so you can start bridging and enacting before you review and close.

### **Tele-supervision using Role Work**

- Focus the question as usual
- When you have agreed how to 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 lack additional chairs to use to mark the roles/options they want to explore. In this case, ask them to choose a cloth and show you it and then stand on it as you help them experience what this role/option feels like. Alternatively they may 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..
- 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 them in order to debrief.

### Tele-supervision using drawing exercises

- Focus the question as usual
- Invite the supervisee to draw/map out what they are describing.
- You might, for example, use the *Six Shape Supervision Structure* devised by Anna Chesner.
- Invite the supervisee to divide a large piece of paper into 6. In turn ask them to draw/map/write in each of the six shapes in answer to these 6 questions that you lead as a meditative exercise:
  - 1 What is the situation/problem?
  - 2 What is your aim/what do you want to achieve?
  - 3 What potential/actual obstacles are in the way of achieving this?
  - 4 How do you feel?
  - 5 Taking a step back, what else is in play in this situation that you haven't factored/represented yet?
  - 6 Where are you now? What is your question now? What are your first steps?
- 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?