

Receiving supervision whilst social distancing/self-isolating

This document is designed to support supervisees in making good use of supervision whilst restrictions on social contact are in place. It comprises 4 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 A checklist for those in supervision, those about to enter supervision and those wondering what has happened about their supervision arrangements
- 4 Notes on receiving 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 can be helpful in restorative, formative and normative ways.

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 of us the loss of the usual routine of social contact and meaningful activity will also create some stress. We may have time and space to consider deeper questions of vocation and identity that the usual busy routine obscures. We 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.

Supervision connects us with someone with whom we have permission to explore the impact of self-isolation on faith, vocation, identity and meaning.

- 2 The balance of our 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 us in a variety of different ways, in these weeks our work is likely to be heavily pastoral and focused on issues created by Covid 19 or exacerbated by it. We may find ourselves dealing with a good deal of anxiety in others that leaves its mark on us; we may find ourselves predominantly dealing with people who are bereaved and afraid; we may find that funeral work assumes a higher profile in our work, either because we are handling more funerals, or because this becomes one of the few gatherings at which we preside. We may find ourselves distressed because we cannot offer the kind of care that we are used to offering face to face or because work in which we have been investing is paused or maybe lost.

Supervision connects us with someone who can help us process the impact of the pastoral demand of this time.

- 3 We are likely to have personal anxieties about family members, and perhaps about our 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 us at the same time as those for whom we care pastorally are raising all the same issues. We may feel responsible for many things and people that whose circumstances we cannot change.

Supervision connects us with someone who will listen to our anxieties, support us in bearing mess and complexity, and help us access specialist support if we need it.

2b Formative supervision whilst social distancing/self-isolating

- 1 Although some of us work from home already, for many of us our own working/living circumstances may have changed. Other family members are at home when they normally are at school or working elsewhere. We may be struggling to concentrate in a new working environment. We may be distracted by constant access to Covid-19 updates. We may not have the team support we are used to.

Supervision is a context in which to identify patterns that are not working and 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? It 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 help shape the future in unexpected ways.

Supervision provides a context in which we can step back and think broadly and deeply about what God is saying in and through this time and to think creatively about how to respond.

- 3 Covid-19 and the associated restrictions are creating all kinds of challenges for the ways in which ministry is normally exercised. This creates opportunities for learning new ways of working and for engaging different skills amongst our various teams to help solve the problems we are facing. There may even be time for engaging in some reading or formal study online in order to equip us for the future.

Supervision is a context in which we can identify our learning needs and ways of meeting them.

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/>. It is important in this context to keep abreast of developments and to interpret these for our contexts, assessing the risks to us and others as we do so. **There is particular safeguarding guidance to follow which you should check.**

Supervision is a context for sharing the task of complex risk assessment

- 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.

- 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 Checklist

If you are in supervision already,

- Check with your supervisor about your next supervision appointment and how that will happen
- If this will be electronic make sure you have a conversation beforehand with your supervisor about the technology you need to set up in order to engage and how to contact each other. Agree too, what to do if the technology does not work as expected.
- Make sure, if you do not normally receive any electronic supervision, that you discuss with your supervisor how to prepare for supervision and what you need at your side in order to set the right atmosphere or use creative methods. This may require a re-visiting of the Supervision Covenant you made. Some guidance for making good use of tele-supervision is offered below.

If you are about to enter supervision,

- Check with your supervisor about your first supervision appointment and how that will happen – if this will be electronic, make sure you have agreed how to contact each other and what to do if the preferred technology fails.
- As supervision is a confidential and boundaried space, you need to think carefully about where you can skype/zoom/phone from so that you are not interrupted. It is also helpful if you are not sat at your desk surrounded by work. Try to find a more reflective space if you can.
- At your first supervision session you will make a supervision covenant with your supervisor. Make sure you discuss the issues that are raised by tele-supervision. Guidance is provided here and it will be useful for you to read this prior to your first session.

If you think you should be in supervision by now but the arrangement has not worked, has fallen into abeyance or has not been made, please be pro-active in contacting the person responsible for your Supervision Implementation Plan. This is usually your District Chair. Alternatively you can contact supervision@methodistchurch.org.uk for help with sorting things out.

4 Notes on tele-supervision

A. 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 your supervisor can see more of you than only your head. It makes more intuitive communication possible if they can see hand gestures and body posture. Have you got a table or shelf you can put your device on so that you can sit back in your chair? If you are using creative methods your supervisor will need to see what you create. If its drawing you can draw and then hold it up to the screen so they can see. If it's small world or cards you may need to angle your screen so your supervisor can see the action. It will take some experimentation to get it right but it's usually worth the trouble. Your supervisor has been given some guidance on how to help you.
- **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 them to keep notes. If they are a visual thinker they may need to draw what they are hearing. Sometimes sharing this with you on the screen can you see what you 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. Please make sure that you at least have pens and paper ready. If you have not yet tried small world, cards or chair work, this may be the moment to try, so try to equip yourself with a basic kit. Evoke cards can be ordered from 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 give you some choices. Get them ready before the supervision in case you may need them! 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.