

WHAT MAKES SUPERVISION WORK



RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HOME VISITING FIELD

WHAT MAKES SUPERVISION WORK: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE HOME VISITING FIELD

This research project emerged from the work of the Home Visiting Forum, a national task group funded by Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and headed by co-chairs Heather Weiss (Harvard University), Debra Daro (Chapin Hall-University of Chicago) and Barbara Wasik (University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill). The Forum has met bi-annually for the past four years, focusing on improving home visiting outcomes through research and collaboration. One of the three working groups of the Forum, the training group, identified as a priority for the field obtaining information from home visitor supervisors on what contributes to successful supervision. This report summarizes the research of the training group.

During the spring and summer of 2004, Liz Sale and Sandra Martin, researchers with the Missouri Institute of Mental Health, conducted six focus groups of selected home visiting program supervisors. The researchers gathered information regarding participants' experiences with supervising home visitors. Each focus group consisted of supervisors from one of the following home visiting models: Early Head Start, Healthy Families America, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters, Nurse-Family Partnership, Parents as Teachers and Parent-Child Home Program. Senior staff at the national offices of each of these models selected the participating supervisors based upon their experience in the field. All attempts were made to balance the groups with representatives from urban/rural areas, males and females, and varied ethnic groups. A total of 30 people participated in the focus groups. The questions asked of supervisors were focused on two areas: the needs of the supervisor and the needs of the home visitor. The following questions were used in the focus groups:

Supervisor Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What organizational or contextual factors do you need to be a successful supervisor? Are there other factors that also help you do your job? Provide examples.
Home Visitor Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What do you think your staff needs most from you? Provide examples.• What do you do to support staff so they can be successful in implementing the goals and objectives of your program?

This report documents the themes that emerged from the focus groups regarding supervision and training of home visitors. The report is presented in two parts; the first part addresses the needs of supervisors and the second addresses the needs of home visitors.

To expand the reach of this report, the Home Visiting Forum's Training Committee members have added comments as well as questions for reflection and discussion that can be used within staff meetings or in training workshops with home visitors and/or supervisors.

SUPERVISOR NEEDS


Supervisors were asked about the organizational and contextual factors that help them succeed. Responses were grouped into eight categories: (I) supportive management, (II) training and professional development, (III) coherent program design, (IV) community linkages, (V) structure and communication, (VI) salary and compensation, (VII) facilities, equipment and administrative support, and (VIII) evaluation.

I. Supportive Management

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Across all programs, supervisors expressed the importance of having support within their organization to allow them to do their job effectively. Support was expressed in several different ways, including (1) support for the individual's success, (2) availability of the supervisor's boss, (3) recognition of demands on their time, (4) time off for self-care, (5) authority and (6) feedback on job performance.

- 1. Support for the individual's success.** Getting sincere recognition for the work supervisors are doing can be critical to a supervisors' morale. Some supervisors are somewhat isolated, so recognition of their accomplishments helps them feel good about the job they are doing and in turn encourages them to enthusiastically work with the home visitors to help them feel good about their job as well.
- 2. Availability.** Several individuals mentioned the need to have someone who was available to them, who wasn't "too busy" to meet with them or discuss ongoing issues. Supervisors need supervision and encouragement as well.
- 3. Recognition of demands on their time.** Supervisors need to have adequate time to do their job effectively. If they are being pulled into other tasks, or if their workloads are not being properly assessed, they will not be able to be effective. Supervisors need time for administrative work as well as time for reflective supervision with staff.


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- 4. Time off for self-care.** Supervisors, as well as home visitors, are often faced with difficult family issues relating to parent and child needs. Supervisors expressed the need for the organizations with which they work to recognize these pressures and to allow them time off when needed to avoid burnout.
 - 5. Authority.** A few supervisors expressed that having authority within the organization was important for them to be effective.
 - 6. Feedback on job performance.** Just as supervisors evaluate the performance of the home visitors, they also want to receive feedback on their performance so that they can continue to grow.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. The types of supports described above are frequently lacking in agencies with home visiting programs. Lack of these supports can lead to supervisor burnout and turnover.
2. Home visiting programs are often not well understood or fully accepted and often are on the periphery of their sponsoring organizations. Home visitors work in isolation, an inherent aspect of home visiting work. Supervisors in home visiting programs try to provide a supportive environment for staff, while often working in isolation themselves.
3. Authority, or a level of decision making that supports supervisors in carrying out their responsibilities is a key element in promoting morale, building leadership capacity and assuring quality.

C. Questions for the Field

1. How can a compelling case be made to agency directors/administrators for putting in place the supports that supervisors need to help them maintain quality services in their programs?
2. Could it be that home visiting supervisors will always have struggles in their role because society does not provide



enough support for young families in general, and therefore providing support for those delivering these services is not recognized as important?

3. What does it really mean to “have authority”? How do supervisors “get” authority? Is it conferred by an organization, or is it developed in the context of the relationships the supervisor creates with those he or she reports to as well as those he or she supervises?

II. Training and Professional Development

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Training and professional development for supervisors was universally mentioned as a vital piece for effective supervision. Training and professional development needs included:

1. **Annual conferences.** Supervisors were very pleased with the conferences that are offered to them and to their home visitors currently, and felt that the orientation and on-going professional development opportunities offered during these conferences were essential. Conferences help to train the supervisors in their field, provide networking opportunities with other supervisors in the field who might have additional experience for them to draw upon, and help them feel less isolated.
2. **Training materials.** Many supervisors stressed the importance of written training materials for supervisors to use to conduct their job.
3. **Continued professional development opportunities.** To effectively continue to improve programming, supervisors mentioned several areas of professional development that they believed were critical. Early childhood and family systems, managerial/supervision skills, skills on conducting group meetings, and proposal-writing skills were some of the areas mentioned, with early childhood training mentioned most often. Knowledge of the job is important.



Some organizations may recommend that supervisors serve a small caseload of families. Organizations need to support this idea and provide time for supervisors to do this.

- 4. Continued networking opportunities.** In addition to the annual conferences, individuals mentioned the importance of continued networking with other supervisors in the home visiting field. Regional meetings of the home visiting program supervisors, listservs to link supervisors together, and other forums that can help supervisors feel that they are part of a bigger whole, assist them in learning more about early childhood, effective supervision, and other relevant issues. Peer-to-peer training and professional development were also encouraged as mechanisms both to receive training and professional development as well as to build linkages with others in the field.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. Supervisors need flexible and responsive administrative support to identify what is needed at a particular site at a specific point in time.
2. Ongoing training for supervisors is one way to support a sense of professional identity and expand knowledge and skills.
3. Reflective supervision (which helps staff to examine their own reactions to working closely with young children and their families) is a critical part of providing quality home visiting services.
4. Supervisors need orientation to the job and opportunities to work with a mentor.

C. Questions for the Field

1. How can supervisors find opportunities to learn from and get support from one another?
2. What specific training topics, formats and written materials would be most helpful to supervisors?


3. Do supervisors have the knowledge, skills and support to provide reflective supervision to their staff?
4. Do supervisors receive reflective supervision themselves?

III. Coherent Program Design

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Several issues related to the program design emerged as important to the successful implementation of home visiting programs. Supervisors identified issues related to shared goals and objectives, curriculum, program identity and program structure.

1. **Shared goals and objectives.** Clearly, supervisors felt that a critical element to successful program implementation was a shared vision of the program's goals and objectives. As one respondent said, the goals of the program should be made "very, very clear" and staff needs to strive toward always "remaining true" to the overall goals of the program. Supervisors felt that curricula, policies and procedures, and quality assurance standards all were very helpful in assuring a shared vision of the program. It is important that the program policy and procedures are in writing.
2. **Curriculum.** Respondents with curriculum-driven programs stressed the need for a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum for successful program implementation. While stressing the need for some adaptations to the curriculum based upon local conditions, supervisors also felt that for the most part, staying with the prescribed curriculum was necessary to provide structure to the program.
3. **Program identity.** Supervisors mentioned several times the need for a distinct program identity to differentiate their program from others being implemented concurrently with the same families. For example, Parents as Teachers programs are often blended with Early Head Start programs, and families do not know that they are participating in both.



For supervisors who are using multiple models, clear identification of the goals of each home visitation program will help them establish a program identity.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. Supervisors are key to creating a shared vision, goals and objectives within a program.
2. A standard curriculum provides a structure that supports quality services. However, if adhered to in a rigid way, it can be a constraint that keeps home visitors from recognizing or responding to important issues that are related to the program's goals or family needs.
3. In some cases one agency or organization may offer 2 or more home visiting models to the community. This can be both useful and confusing for agencies, for staff, for the community and for families.

C. Questions for the Field

1. What should supervisors do to encourage staff to buy into the program's vision, goals, and objectives?
2. Why do agencies or programs run more than one home visiting model simultaneously?
3. What are some of the specific challenges for supervisors running "blended programs" (programs that offer two or more of the national home visiting models, or use a self-developed model as well as a national model)?
4. Do staff view themselves as part of a team or as part of a hierarchical organization without the authority to do this job?
5. How does it impact services for families to know which home visiting model they are a part of?
6. How does it impact services for staff to understand which home visiting model they are implementing?

IV. Community Linkages

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

A fourth essential area that supervisors felt was important to them doing their job well was understanding and utilizing community resources and making the program known to the community. This included coordinating with referral agencies, tapping into community expertise and making the community aware of the services that the program could make available to families in the community. One individual suggested that supervisors make formal presentations to local agencies to build linkages and opportunities for recruitment and referrals. It was pointed out that it takes time to develop collaborative partnerships in the community.

In particular, some of the supervisors mentioned the need to have stronger links with mental and physical health professionals in their community. Some individuals felt fortunate to have mental health professionals available to them; others felt that they lacked that necessary connection.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. Supervisors handle many diverse responsibilities within their own programs and within the community. They coach front line staff, publicize the program, develop interagency agreements, recruit families, teach, write and seek out information on promising practices.
2. Written agreements can be helpful in managing collaborative relationships.

C. Questions for the Field

1. What are reasonable job responsibilities for supervisors? Should they be expected to fulfill so many diverse responsibilities?
2. Is it realistic to expect supervisors to have the experience, knowledge and skill needed to perform all of these functions?

3. Are some of these tasks more appropriate for a director, manager or public relations person?
4. What are some of the challenges and benefits involved in collaborative relationships?
5. Who is responsible for assuring that supervisors have access to needed health and mental health professionals in the community that can fulfill the needs of the population they serve?

V. Structure and Communication

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Having a structured program with regular communication was stressed as essential to effective supervision. Structure and communication included the following:

1. Clarity regarding who supervisors should go to for what issues.
2. Clear lines of communication between supervisors and their bosses.
3. Weekly meetings with staff to (a) build teamwork, (b) practice reflective listening, and (c) create “teachable moments”.
4. Area meetings with supervisors from various program agencies.
5. Use of paging, email and faxes to communicate with their bosses, colleagues, and home visitors.
6. Documentation of program decisions, communication, etc. via computers and email.
7. Meeting minutes that can be shared with those not in attendance.
8. Clarity in roles of supervisor and home visitors.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. It may not be realistic in all settings to expect supervisors to hold weekly staff meetings.
2. Supervisors may need to make some strategic choices about how to use staff meetings. They may want to find out from staff if they see the meetings as useful and find out if staff would recommend any changes to those meetings.
3. Sometimes supervisors have conflicts or disagreements with those to whom they report. This can make communication difficult.

C. Questions for the Field

1. How do supervisors decide which means of communication (e.g. in-person, phone, e-mail, paging, faxes) to use?
2. How often should a supervisor hold staff meetings?
3. What is the best use of staff meeting time?
4. How do supervisors learn to engage in “reflective listening” and “reflective supervision”?
5. Can supervisors use supervisory skills to supervise up the “chain of command” in order to address disagreements or conflicts with those to whom they report?

VI. Salary and Compensation

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Salary was a concern for some supervisors. A few individuals felt that salaries for both supervisors and home visitors were too low, and that it was important for the larger agency in which they worked to be aware of their duties to be sure that salary increases were in line with their duties.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. Supervisors generally feel they are not paid enough to handle all their various and broad responsibilities.

2. Doing a salary study and an analysis of the supervisor job description would be helpful.

C. Questions for the Field

1. Are supervisors' and home visitors' salaries commensurate with the salaries of similar positions in the organization? In the community? How does one obtain this information?
2. Does higher salary have a direct correlation with improvements in staff and program quality?
3. Should a supervisor or staff member who is considered a "paraprofessional" (i.e., the person does not have a college degree) be paid the same as one who has a 2- or 4-year degree when doing the same job?

VII. Facilities, Equipment and Administrative Support

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Many of the supervisors felt that effective program implementation depends in part on the available facilities and administrative support. Facilities (including private offices for consultation with home visitors and conference rooms) and equipment (including computers, telephones and email access) were all mentioned as important to effective supervision. In addition, access to administrative support personnel who could assist in administrative and clerical tasks (for example, creating a PowerPoint presentation for use in presentations to the community) was felt to be important as well.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. It is true that private offices, electronic equipment and telephones, and administrative support are important. At the same time, sometimes a program or organization lacks the resources to provide these things. It may be necessary to find creative ways to do good work with the resources that are available.

2. Staff are often overburdened and cannot manage the data entry work required by funders and evaluators. Programs can benefit by hiring a data entry clerk for maintaining files and for evaluation purposes.

C. Questions for the Field

1. Is there a change a supervisor could make to improve the program's office environment? What would that be?
2. If you have no private office for individual supervision, what could you do to locate a private space?
3. If you don't have meeting space in your office, how could you find space to hold staff meetings?
4. Is there any way to get needed equipment for your office if your organization doesn't have funds to purchase it?

VIII. Evaluation

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Several individuals mentioned the importance of supporting evaluation of their programs. Evaluation was seen as helpful in improving program implementation, demonstrating program effectiveness, and ultimately securing additional funding. Several individuals mentioned the importance of supervisors knowing reliable and valid measures of child development for use in screening, assessment and evaluation of child outcomes. Supervisors are being asked by school districts, funding agencies and their own bosses for concrete findings from their home visiting programs to demonstrate effectiveness. Without the proper evaluation tools in place, supervisors have to rely upon anecdotal evidence, which is not persuasive enough to convince others of the effectiveness of their home visiting programs. Supervisors need advice from the evaluation field as to what tools to use and how to fund evaluations that will meet their needs.



B. Comments from the Training Group

1. In addition to thinking about evaluation, supervisors need to think about Continuous Quality Improvement (or Learning and Continuous Improvement). This, in part, entails using information generated through evaluation to make changes and improvements in the program and then evaluating the impact of those changes. This is how programs evolve to improve services and to respond to the community's and the families' changing needs.
2. Programs need to have a theory of change (a way of explaining how the services, interventions and activities of the program are expected to lead to the desired changes).

C. Questions for the Field

1. Does the program have a theory of change? Can the staff and supervisor articulate it? Do the staff and supervisor agree with it?
2. Does the supervisor make programmatic decisions based upon the extent to which they fit in with the theory of change?
3. What is the importance of having a system for "learning and continuous improvement"? Can a quality program run without such a system? How structured is a program's system of learning and continuous improvement?
4. How can outside technical assistance for continuous quality improvement be helpful? What experiences has the supervisor had with such technical assistance?
5. What process is in place to assure fidelity to the model?



HOME VISITOR NEEDS


The second question asked of supervisors was what they thought their staff needed most from them. In many instances, the needs of the home visitors were similar to those of the supervisor. This demonstrates a parallel process. Responses were clustered around five major categories: (I) supportive management, (II) professional growth and development, (III) structure and communication, (IV) supervisor experience and (V) access to mental health services.

I. Supportive Management

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Supervisors felt very strongly that being supportive to their staff was one of the most critical elements to effective supervision. Home visitors benefit from having the following supports in place:

- 1. Availability.** Individuals repeatedly stressed the need for supervisors who are available to them at all times (an “open door” policy) and who they can talk to about stressful situations that may arise on their home visits. Several supervisors mentioned the importance of going on home visits with their home visitors on a regular basis as a means of showing support, providing advice in difficult situations, and identifying strengths and needs of the staff.
- 2. Recognition and celebration.** Supervisors mentioned several ways to recognize their home visitors, including offering daily reassurances and sincere appreciation, providing positive feedback, practicing saying “I agree with your next step,” reflective supervision without advice-giving, advocating for the home visitor’s needs (caseload of families and number of visits), arranging for certificates from training sessions, demonstrating to school superintendents and others how important services are to district families, and celebrating staff accomplishments at the end of the year. As one supervisor stated, they need to be the “champions”



for the home visitors, recognizing and advocating for their needs, and celebrating their accomplishments.

- 3. Support for managing stress.** Home visitors encounter many families with very stressful lives and their workloads are often at maximum level. The demands of the job are intense and the job is often very isolating. Supervisors can assist home visitors to refuel, self assess and continue to learn to cope with stressful situations. Several supervisors suggested that it's important to create a work environment where home visitors are provided with mental health breaks and mental health assistance if needed. Supervisors also agreed that staff retreats are a way to reduce stress and make the home visitor's job more enjoyable and manageable. It was recommended by the focus group to use humor and opportunities for fun during staff meetings.
- 4. Trust and honesty.** Supervisors stressed the importance of being honest with home visitors about the job demands before they accept the position so that they would be walking into the job with their eyes wide open. Supervisors hire new employees who have the appropriate educational background and experience for the job. Once hired, trusting staff to make smart decisions and not always looking over their shoulders was mentioned as being an important means of developing a strong relationship with the home visitor.
- 5. Addressing safety issues.** Many home visitors go to homes in high-risk areas. A very important need of home visitors is that their supervisors provide safety tools for home visitors to use. Going out in teams of two or more people may be necessary in some neighborhoods. Teaching home visitors how to watch for dangerous situations and how to deal with them is also vital. Leaving a schedule at the office with the week's appointments is important for keeping track of each home visitor's whereabouts.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. It is important that home visitors have regular and consistent opportunities for supervision, as well as access as needed to their supervisors.
2. A supervisor can work to reduce the stress that home visiting staff encounter, but one can't eliminate it. A supervisor has to gauge staff members' needs and respond in a flexible way. Supervisors need to be good listeners.
3. Supervisors and staff express the need for feedback, support and recognition. This is a realistic need, and yet may contribute to the perception that early education or social services are "soft" (i.e. not based on hard science and data).
4. It is critical to have systems for accountability. Trust alone is not enough!

C. Questions for the Field

1. In supervision, how much time do you spend discussing the home visitor's tasks and routines (i.e. caseload, record keeping, punctuality and reliability) and how much time do you spend on helping the home visitor recognize and handle the feelings that arise in the work that can lead to burnout or interfere with quality of services? Are these areas of discussion entirely separate?
2. What are the most important things to discuss in supervision with staff?
3. What are some creative ways to support your home visiting staff?
4. How is burnout prevented in a program?
5. What is the role of the program in addressing staff members' mental health needs?




II. Professional Growth and Development

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Finding opportunities for continual professional growth and development, as well as providing annual reviews of performance with merit increases for good performance were mentioned as critical to effective home visitor supervision. Supervisors should: advocate for the training needs of the home visitor— particularly in the area of early childhood development, encourage participation at local conferences, inform home visitors of what the supervisors have learned at conferences they have attended, provide yearly performance appraisals that help home visitors with their professional growth, and create on-the-job training opportunities by matching newer home visitors with more seasoned employees. All these activities were felt to be important ways of promoting the growth and development of home visitors. Supervisors have the responsibility to focus on specific skill-building of their staff, making sure home visitors are sufficiently trained to do their jobs. Another suggestion is to assist staff with learning about community agencies and assisting them in making those connections.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. Supervisors should develop a plan with each staff member to support his or her professional growth.
2. Supervisors should have an overall professional development plan so that when staff takes part in a training, that training is reinforced through individual and staff supervision. This is more helpful than simply sending staff to a number of “one-shot” trainings.
3. Supervisors should find out if staff have different preferences as to how they build their professional skills. Some may prefer to read, and others attend workshops. Staff can learn



by discussing their work with families in a facilitated group, and learning can take place within a supervisory session, as well.

C. Questions for the Field

1. How does a supervisor decide if a staff member should go to a conference or training that he or she is interested in?
2. Is it important for staff and for the supervisor to continue formal education in a college or university? Do organizations encourage or have in place career pathways for staff?
3. How does the supervisor decide what topics staff need training in? Does each staff member need the same training?
4. How can experienced staff members help train new staff?

III. Structure and Communication

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Very much mirroring the responses of the supervisors, creating a structured work environment that allows for frequent communication with home visitors was repeatedly mentioned as a critical part of effective supervision. Weekly staff meetings with home visitors and regular individual meetings on a less regular but consistent basis, a consistent set of standards, clear goals and objectives, paperwork (checklists of things that are turned in, weekly logs of what has been done), and definite rules, procedures and lines of commands were felt to be important to creating a structured environment for home visitors. Supervisors also suggested the importance of making sure that home visitors have the materials they need to perform their job.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. Some national organizations require weekly staff meetings and other models meet less often. Distance that staff must travel to attend a staff meeting may be the issue. Best

practice for reflective supervision suggests meetings should be held on a regular, consistent basis.

2. Some staff members require more structure from their supervisors than others do.
3. Supervisors seeking to assure that staff members have the supplies and materials they need is both a practical function and a source of emotional support. It communicates that supervisors recognize home visitors deserve respect and that their work is important.
4. Often, when there are tensions or conflicts in a program, people point to a “lack of communication” as the problem. Communication difficulties may be a sign of another underlying problem, rather than being the cause of the problem.


C. Questions for the Field

1. How often does a supervisor meet with staff?
2. What processes and systems are in place now for communication with staff? Are they working well? How can this be determined?
3. How does a supervisor assess and respond to the different needs that staff have for structure? Do staff prefer more hands-on supervision or more autonomy on the job?
4. What does a supervisor do if a staff member does not respond to efforts to talk with them about how their work is going?
5. Does the organization have a code of conduct and/or policies which cover behavior of staff?

IV. Supervisor Experience

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

Home visitors need a supervisor who has experience working in the home visiting field and who, therefore, can play a mentoring role for them in helping them address the needs of their families. Several supervisors noted that they continue



to serve families while supervising. By doing so, they keep themselves aware of the issues in the home that might arise, stay familiar with and use current curricula so that they do not come too detached from the home visitors' world, and are more able to understand their concerns.

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. There are both similarities and differences between what staff need and what supervisors need. Supervisors advocate for staff and staff advocate for families.
2. It is important to recognize and make use of the parallel process in relationships. When supervisors make time for staff, listen to them carefully, treat them with respect, support their strengths, and assist with their struggles, staff will be able to do the same with their families.


C. Questions for the Field

1. Has the supervisor gone out on home visits with their staff? What can be learned in doing that?
2. What are the biggest challenges for a supervisor in supervising staff who spend much of their time alone in family's homes?
3. How does a supervisor maintain accountability with their staff?
4. How does a supervisor learn to balance priorities? (e.g., What does a supervisor do when a staff member really has to talk about a difficult experience or situation, and the supervisor is under pressure to get a report written before the end of the day?)

V. Access to Mental Health Services

A. Responses from Focus Group Participants

As with the supervisors, home visitors frequently need to refer families to mental health professionals, to know more about the mental health field (particularly anxiety and depression)



and/or need assistance themselves. Supervisors need to create linkages within the community to help families and staff find needed mental health services. As one individual said, “I think that more programs would benefit from using mental health consultants because so many issues come up that we are not trained to deal with. We can’t do it all so we need to look for other resources.”

B. Comments from the Training Group

1. Many home visitors do not have the training to respond to families with mental illness. Yet, in home visiting programs, many parents may have depression or other mental health problems. Infants and toddlers can also suffer from mental illness. It is critical that mental health consultation be available to programs and that home visiting programs advocate for needed services in the community.
2. Families in need of mental health services may refuse to follow through on referrals for these services. Home visiting programs may wish to hire a mental health professional who can go out on home visits with the family’s worker. Another option is to create a collaborative relationship with a mental health program willing to consider providing in-home services.
3. Some programs see the “strengths based” approach as focusing only on family strengths and not addressing problems or stresses. Others interpret “family-centered” as only acting on those goals the family identifies. Yet, our role as professionals includes sharing our knowledge and expertise with families. A family member may not realize they have signs of depression, for example, and that depression is treatable. Or a parent may not recognize signs of a child’s developmental delay, which could be treated most effectively in the earliest years of life. Families have the right to say no to referrals for other services, but we



have the responsibility to share what we know with families so that they can make an informed choice.

C. Questions for the Field

1. How can home visitors be supported in recognizing and responding to signs of mental health difficulty in families?
2. Should home visiting programs provide services to families with substance abuse, domestic violence, or mental illness?
3. In a program that is strengths based and family-centered, what does staff do if the parent's primary goal is to find a job and she does not want to discuss her family life, but the home visitor suspects that there is domestic violence in the family?



SUMMARY

Focus groups of six of the leading national home visiting organizations in the United States yielded important information regarding effective ways to supervise home visitors. Lessons learned from experienced supervisors reveals that critical needs of supervisors include the following:

1. supportive work environment
2. structure and communication
3. training and professional development
4. coherent program design
5. strong community linkages
6. adequate salary and compensation
7. adequate facilities and administrative support
8. formal evaluation to show program effectiveness

Needs of home visitors are similar. Home visitors' needs include the following:

1. supportive work environment where they feel guided
2. recognition, trust and support around issues of safety
3. opportunities for professional growth and development
4. structure and regular communication with their supervisors
5. access to mental health services for themselves and their families
6. evaluation of program implementation to build upon the strengths of the program and grow professionally.

Incorporating these lessons learned into future programming is essential to building stronger and more effective home visiting programs that can best meet the needs of today's families.

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501 Creative Cover art and design

All the program supervisors from the six national models that participated in the focus groups

