



## **Reflective Supervision Best Practices**

Western Michigan University

School of Social Work

Adapted for Field Education, from Michigan State University School of Social Work &  
MI-AIMH Guidelines

## **Purpose of Reflective Supervision**

Reflective supervision in field education is a cornerstone of social work training. It creates a safe, supportive environment where students integrate classroom knowledge, personal reflection, and practice experience. At WMU, reflective supervision promotes professional growth, self-awareness, and alignment with the NASW Code of Ethics and CSWE Competencies.

## **Core Practices in Reflective Supervision**

### **Establish a Trusting Relationship:**

- Be emotionally present and authentic.
- Listen actively, observe carefully, and avoid harsh judgment.
- Demonstrate compassion for student challenges.
- Invite student feedback to strengthen the supervisory partnership.
- Clarify and maintain appropriate boundaries.

### **Communicate the Value of Reflection:**

- Hold regularly scheduled, uninterrupted supervision sessions.
- Model reflective thinking in both individual and group settings.
- Use an agenda developed collaboratively with the student.
- Remain accessible and provide guidance in crisis situations.

### **Foster Reflective Process:**

- Create a safe, open, and non-judgmental environment.
- Encourage exploration of thoughts, feelings, and reactions.
- Attend to how student emotions impact practice.
- Listen more than you speak; respond with empathy and curiosity.
- Support development of observation, listening, and critical reflection skills.

### **Promote Professional Development:**

- Identify and build on student strengths.
- Provide constructive, timely feedback.
- Support students in taking ownership of their experiences.
- Normalize mistakes as learning opportunities.
- Use reflective tools (e.g., process recordings, journals, case reflections).
- Ask reflective questions that connect practice, values, and ethics.

## **Reflective Questions for Supervisors & Students**

### **Establishing the Relationship:**

- What are your expectations of supervision?
- What prior experiences do you bring to this relationship?
- How do you learn best?
- How do you manage stress and conflict?

### **Developing the Learning Contract:**

- What are your interests, strengths, and growth areas?
- What do you anticipate will be most challenging?
- What skills from coursework need to be integrated into practice?

### **Ongoing Supervision:**

- How do you describe your style of practice with clients?
- What challenges have you faced and how did you approach them?
- How do personal values, biases, and identities influence your practice?
- How do issues of race, culture, privilege, and power affect your work with clients?

#### **Mid-Semester:**

- What progress have you made toward competencies?
- What areas need more focus?
- What strengths have you applied successfully?
- How would you evaluate your own performance at this point?

#### **End of Semester:**

- How have you prepared for client transitions or terminations?
- What professional accomplishments are you most proud of?
- How has your identity as a social worker developed during this placement?
- What knowledge and skills will you take forward into future practice?

### **WMU Application**

At WMU, reflective supervision should:

- Be integrated into weekly supervision hours.
- Explicitly connect student experiences to CSWE competencies.
- Include attention to anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion (ADEI) principles.
- Be documented in supervision logs or process recordings where appropriate.
- Support both professional skill-building and student well-being.