

How to Advocate for ... Supervision

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Describe a time when you had to advocate for supervision as a graduate student.

For most of my graduate career I was very fortunate to have ample supervision from dedicated and talented supervisors. However, I did have one externship experience in an urban school district that included primarily off-site supervision; I had to learn to function very independently during my days in those schools. I'm afraid I can't really describe how I advocated for supervision in that situation, because I didn't really speak up even though I probably should have. I know I would have benefited from having someone in the building with me for support, or even to periodically observe my work, but due to limited resources and the overall circumstances, it just wasn't feasible. I tried to figure things out on my own and get by, but looking back I can see that probably wasn't the best thing to do.

What advice would you give individuals just starting their graduate careers on how to advocate for supervision?

I think being specific about what you need is helpful. This often means reflecting on your strengths and weaknesses and making sure your supervisor knows where you need more support and in what areas you can function more independently. Good supervisors will ask you about these things and help you set goals, but because a lot of supervisors aren't specifically trained in the fundamentals of supervision, not everyone will do this. In that event, you may have to take more initiative and lead that conversation yourself. When you're very early in your training you may not really know what you don't know, but at that stage your program faculty and field supervisors should be assigning work that is developmentally appropriate for your level of training (e.g., more shadowing and less direct service with clients at first). As you learn and grow, those areas of strength and need will start to emerge, and you will be better positioned to discuss them with supervisors as you seek out and embark on different training experiences.

What advice would you give to individuals in the middle of their graduate careers on how to advocate for supervision?

As you start to more clearly understand your strengths, weaknesses, and training goals, you will be better able to talk with supervisors about what you want and need from supervision. You will also start to have more experiences with various supervisors. Keep in mind that different supervisors may give different, even conflicting, guidance—that's OK and to be anticipated. For example, one assessment supervisor may tell you to write reports one way, while another tells you to do the opposite. By working with a range of supervisors, you will gain a broad perspective and ultimately decide how to do things for yourself when you are ready for independent practice.

What advice would you give to individuals toward the end of their graduate careers on how to advocate for supervision?

As you approach the end of training, I think it's important to think about your own future as a supervisor. We should all give back to the profession by mentoring or supervising less experienced school psychologists, and if your training didn't include specific coursework on supervision (particularly at the specialist level, few do), you may have to educate yourself. If possible, look for appropriate opportunities to engage in some basic supervision during internship. Even experiences like coaching a teacher to implement an intervention can provide opportunities to practice skills like observing performance and providing constructive feedback. But experiences like working with first-year practicum students or others who are earlier in the training process than you are can be helpful for building initial supervision skills. Also, start thinking about how you will access postgraduate professional support. Particularly if you plan on applying for national certification (which everyone should!), you will need to engage in at least 1 year of mentoring or supervision during your first renewal cycle (i.e., your first 3 years of practice). NASP's Find-a-Mentor program is a great way to connect with someone with experience who could help guide you through those early years if you don't have access to supervision or mentoring in your first position. But supervision is important across your full career span, so always be on the lookout for ways to connect with others for feedback and enhancement of your skills!

What is the main thing you want readers to know about when advocating for supervision?

Supervision is important for school psychologists at all career stages, not just students! Everyone can benefit from supervision, but it's not always readily available, so you may have to take the initiative to speak up for what you need.

Final thoughts?

Thanks for highlighting this important and sometimes overlooked topic!