At the end of this module, you will be able to:

1. Explain the role of a supervisor in supporting best practice
2. Identify strategies that can facilitate critical thinking
3. Assist assessors in identifying red flags in the assessment process and placement supervision
4. Identify errors in critical thinking
5. Describe the steps to follow when having difficult conversations

The Role of the Supervisor

Three main functions of supervisors:
- Administrative
- Educational/clinical
- Supportive

Three main strategies used to carry out the functions:
- Modeling
- Coaching
- Reflective Supervision

There will be situations throughout the life of the case when assessors will be outside of their scope of practice and need greater supervision.
Identifying Red Flags

Complicated areas during the Homestudy process where more guidance will be needed:
- Unresolved personal issues
- Rigid or inflexible beliefs
- Marital difficulties
- Child-rearing problems
- A history of unstable mental or emotional problems
- Physical health problems

Other times when the worker will need more guidance:
- When the family’s strengths don’t match the child’s characteristics
- When the family doesn’t support the agency, is secretive, or the child doesn’t appear to be thriving.

Supporting Critical Thinking

Seven steps in critical thinking:
1. Determine the purpose
2. Identify relevant assessment criteria or questions
3. Gather information
4. Analyze information
5. Test hypotheses
6. Synthesize information to draw conclusions
7. Make well-informed decisions

Organizational practices that can support critical thinking:
- Learning cultures
- Trauma-informed care
- Diversity competence
Engaging Critical Thinking Skills

Reflective supervision empowers staff by helping them gain confidence in their decision-making skills.

Kolb’s model of reflective supervision has four stages: experience, reflection, analysis, and action planning.

During the reflection stage, supervisors ask reflective questions to help assessors evaluate the quality of the information they have gathered, explore their biases, and draw accurate conclusions.
Critical Thinking Errors

There are three points in time when critical thinking errors occur:

- Errors When Gathering the Information
- Errors When Evaluating the Information
- Errors When Drawing Conclusions

The best way assessors can avoid making critical thinking errors is to always be aware of their tendency to make them.

Difficult Conversations

Steps when having difficult conversations:

1. Reflection
2. Decision
3. Preparing
4. Approaching
5. Listening
6. Problem solving
**Action Planning**

Identify a critical thinking error an assessor made recently. Write down three action steps you will take to address this error with the assessor.

1. 

2. 

3. 

**Resources**


SUPERVISING ASSESSORS

Strength, Minimal, Caution

Directions: Read the levels of family functioning for the coping skills assessment category. Then, read each scenario. Identify the level each scenario is portraying and why.

Assessment Category: Coping Skills and History of Stress Management

Strength

1) Applicants can describe difficult or traumatic situations; how it affected them; and how they coped. Applicants’ self-perceptions are accurate and appropriate; reveal insight into their coping style.
2) Applicants have experienced changes in family composition. They are able to articulate the impact of those changes and their efforts to adjust in a healthy and functional way.
3) Applicants demonstrate their capacity to be flexible and accommodate changes easily. They have the ability to develop and implement contingency plans. They are not upset or threatened when faced with last-minute changes.
4) Applicants can identify childhood traumas, and how these traumas have impacted them.

Minimal

1) Applicants can identify only a few stressful situations and report they have yet to be faced with a serious crisis or traumatic event.
2) Applicants have few outside supports and must largely depend on themselves to manage difficult situations.

Caution

1) Applicants have no outside support system.
2) Applicants may minimize or deny experiencing a stressful or traumatic situation.
3) Applicants’ descriptions of stressful situations indicate poor coping or adaptive capacity. They lack adequate ability to manage and resolve changes, losses, or trauma.
4) Applicants blame others for personal problems or try to manage by ignoring the situation. They are comfortable allowing others to handle their problems and lack insight into their own ineptitude.
Scenario One

Applicant is currently parenting her nephew after her sister’s incarceration. She is loving and patient with him, even though it is clear that he has not accepted her. Applicant can empathize with her nephew and can talk about how he might be feeling. She acknowledges her sadness at their relationship, but doesn’t blame him. She also acknowledges her anger at her sister and her struggle to support her. She regularly sees a therapist and is active in a support group for people with incarcerated family members. She is active at her nephew’s school, and attends the PTA meetings.

Scenario Two

Applicants live in a rural area and rarely come to town. They pride themselves on being self-sufficient, growing their own food and maintaining a few farm animals. They are not friendly with any of their neighbors. They have had a falling out with both her family and his, so do not have contact with any family members. They describe their families as nosy and opinionated. They are resistant to sharing information with the assessor and question why the information is needed. The husband’s father died when he was a boy, but he reports feeling little sadness at this and was just eager to get out of the house when he turned 16. The wife recently lost her job due to her treatment of customers, but she feels she was justified in her behavior as they were rude to her first. She also reports her boss didn’t like her so she knew she wouldn’t last long there.

Scenario Three

Applicant reports an easy childhood with few problems. His parents and siblings live out of state but he visits them twice a year. The only loss he can remember is a beloved dog that died when he was a boy. He remembers crying himself to sleep, but it wasn’t something that had a long term impact. He reports a desire to get more sleep and exercise, but can’t seem to find the time. When he is stressed, he recruits a co-worker to join him for a beer or two after work. He recently switched jobs, however, and is having some difficulty adjusting to the new environment and getting to know his new co-workers. He generally tries to solve problems himself but will sometimes seek the advice of his older brother.
SUPERVISING ASSESSORS

Organizational Practices that Support Critical Thinking

Learning Cultures

A learning culture is an environment in which assessors feel enabled to “question their practice, critically analyze and evaluate experiences, and debrief after challenging or stressful encounters” (ASHP foundation, 2012).

A learning culture supports critical thinking by:
  o Creating an environment in which assessors do not base decisions on a defined set of rules, but use guidelines, with their own professional experience and judgment, to make decisions
  o Allowing risk taking and learning from mistakes

The supervisor can create a learning culture by:
  o Acting as “continuous learners as well as continuous teachers” (Fletcher 1999 in Aldgate, et al., 2007)
  o Enabling others to take responsibility for problems and working collaboratively with others to solve them (Fletcher 1999 in Aldgate, et al., 2007)
  o Keeping assessors engaged by discovering and developing their talents and abilities (IHS, 2015)
  o Making it safe for assessors to make mistakes and learn from them (IHS, 2015)
  o Supporting assessors’ attempts to develop competence, effectiveness, independence, and self-directedness in their work (IHS, 2015)
  o Assuming something is functioning well, drawing out those characteristics/strategies/tools that made it function well, and implement them. This is known as appreciative inquiry (Aldgate, et al., 2007).

Trauma-Informed Practice

“A trauma-informed child and family service system is one in which all parties involved recognize and respond to the impact of traumatic stress on those who have contact with the system including children, caregivers, and service providers. Programs and agencies within such a system infuse and sustain trauma awareness, knowledge, and skills into their organizational cultures, practices, and policies. They act in collaboration with all those who are involved with the child, using the best available science, to facilitate and support the recovery and resiliency of the child and family” (NCTSN, 2013).

Trauma-informed practice supports critical thinking by:
  o Teaching assessors how to interview in a supportive way that avoids triggers which could cause the person to shut down.
  o Encouraging assessors to gather information related to the applicant’s past traumas as part of the assessment.
  o Exploring the relationship between past trauma and current behavior.
The supervisor can support trauma-informed practice by:
- Modeling trauma informed care in supervision
- Implementing use of trauma screening tools
- Recognizing and addressing indicators of secondary trauma in assessors
- Supporting the implementation of the essential elements of trauma informed child welfare work (NCTSN, 2013):
  1. Maximize Physical And Psychological Safety For Children And Families
  2. Identify Trauma-Related needs of Children and Families
  3. Enhance Child Well-Being and Resiliency
  4. Enhance Family Well-Being and Resiliency
  5. Partner with Youth and Families
  6. Enhance the Well-Being and Resilience of Those Working in the System
  7. Partner with Agencies and Systems that Interact with Children and Families

**Diversity Competence**

Diversity competence is:
1) The capacity to relate to persons with diverse characteristics in a sensitive, respectful, and productive way.
2) An ongoing developmental process that includes:
   - An acquired understanding of the patterns and potential dynamics of diverse groups and cultures, including our own
   - The understanding of how culture (the values, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions acquired from affiliate groups), and other circumstances influence our own and other people’s thinking and behaviors
   - The ability to manage and adapt to the dynamics of difference, and work effectively with all people

Diversity competence supports critical thinking by teaching the assessor to:
- Successfully engage a family by being respectful of the family’s diversity, allowing all relevant information to be gathered
- Accurately interpret the information gathered

The supervisor can support diversity competence by:
- Creating a safe place for assessors (confidentiality, respect differences)
- Encouraging self-awareness and self-reflection
- Encouraging assessors to ask questions to confirm or rule out their assumptions
- Encouraging trainings specific to different kinds of diversity
SUPERVISING ASSESSORS

Questions to Facilitate Critical Thinking

Identify questions you would ask the assessor.
Write down as many as you can think of in three minutes.

Ms. Johnson is applying for dual approval for foster-to-adopt. At the most recent interview, she shared that she attempted suicide at age 14 after the death of her sister. She was hospitalized for a month. She reports she was connected with a wonderful trauma-informed therapist and the proper medication and has not had any suicidal thoughts since. She participated in a support group for those who have lost siblings for several years after her sister’s death.

Ms. Johnson noted on her application that she had one DUI 13 years ago. When asked about the DUI, she reported it happened after a night out when she received her final divorce papers. She was with a group of women she has known since high school that regularly get together. After the DUI, she participated in AA for seven years. She continues to keep in touch with her former sponsor.

Ms. Johnson can get depressed sometimes, but she knows her triggers and early symptoms and has a therapist she can see a needed. She regularly does yoga and meditates. She is active in her church and sings in the choir.

Ms. Johnson has never parented and has expressed some nervousness and fear. She is unsure of the day-to-day responsibilities of caring for a baby. Her main fear is that she will get attached to the child and then lose him or her. She does have a nephew she watches occasionally. She is motivated to adopt because she feels this is the best way for her to become a mother. She is not currently in a relationship and if she were to become pregnant, she is fearful of stopping her medication and having her depressive symptoms return.
Reflective Supervision

Reflective supervision *empowers* staff. It can also be used to identify issues as supervisors carefully listen to the assessor’s responses to the reflective questions. The following behaviors indicate issues that need addressed (MSU, 2009):

- Labeling and dehumanizing language – assessor cannot see the family or person’s strengths
- Sarcasm - assessor disguises hostility as humor
- Sugar coating - assessor uses so much positive language to try and hide the problem that it is confusing or even misleading for the family or person
- Loss of empathy – assessor can’t see the other person’s point of view or consider why a family or person might engage in seemingly negative or strange behavior
- Avoidance - assessor doesn’t make decisions or act in a timely manner

Kolb’s supervision cycle:

1. **Experience** – The supervisor and assessor discuss the activity or task the assessor is focused on completing (ex. homestudy, placement supervision).
2. **Reflection** – The supervisor and assessor discuss any issues or concerns in completing the task. The supervisor asks reflective questions to explore the assessor’s thoughts, feelings, and reactions. They also explore any biases or other factors that may be affecting these thoughts, feelings, and reactions.
3. **Analysis** – The supervisor and assessor explore possible solutions to the concern or issue. Each alternative is examined and the best solution is selected.
4. **Action planning** – The supervisor and assessor make a plan for carrying out the solution.

Questions that facilitate critical thinking will start with phrases such as (pacwrc.pitt.edu):

- Describe what you have learned so far about...
- Tell me about...
- How has the family...
- Do you feel...
- How do the family members feel about...
- How have you assessed...
- How do you know...
- What needs to happen in order for...
- What tells you the family...
- Help me understand...
- Share your thinking...
SUPERVISING ASSESSORS

Critical Thinking Errors

Read the scenarios assigned to your group and identify which error is represented and why.

Errors When Gathering the Information

1. Poor Training - Not knowing what to ask or what information learned is relevant
2. Poor Documentation - Not accurately recording information, not remembering the information accurately, subjective documentation
3. Ignoring Information from the Past - Exploring current issues while ignoring relevant past issues
4. Errors in Communication – not listening, not checking to see if they understand what you are saying, not considering diversity regarding non-verbal communication

a. You, the supervisor, are reviewing the work of Assessor Cannon as it relates to the Harper family. You see that a whole section of the Harper family assessment describes the Jamison family. It appears as though Assessor Cannon may have cut and pasted parts of the Jamison family Homestudy into the Harper family assessment. ____________

b. Assessor Workman went to the Smith family home last night for the family’s initial visit. Upon arrival to the Smith home, Assessor Workman realized she’d left the prepared packet with the family’s information and guide questions at the office. Assessor Workman always just follows the guide when conducting interviews, and without it she could not recall any initial questions that should be asked. This left Assessor Workman and the Smith family frustrated. Assessor Workman excused herself from the family home and rescheduled another visit at a later date. ________

c. The Johnson family is a newly approved foster home that worked with assessor Cross. They received their first placement of siblings, ages 14 and 15, from a neighboring county. The county case worker called to complain that the family would not allow the teenagers out of their sight – they could not go to friends’ homes or even outside alone. The worker also reported the home was very noisy, to the point that conversations were difficult. Assessor Cross, he acknowledged the home was very loud. He remembers discussing supervision with the family and Ms. Johnson giving him a surprised look, but it was so noisy that he decided not to ask her about it. __________

d. Assessor Kohl was on his third homestudy visit with the Gibson family. The Gibsons sat comfortably together, holding hands, as they answered his questions about their relationship. They acknowledged they sometimes have heated arguments and admitted two physical confrontations, both a few years ago. The police came to the home on both occasions but no one was ever arrested. The couple denies any domestic violence currently and stressed these incidents were long ago. With the family’s assurance that their relationship is no longer violent, Assessor Kohl states he has no concerns and is moving forward with the family’s approval. ________
Errors When Evaluating the Information

1. Focusing on the Red Herring - Focusing on irrelevant but memorable/emotional information
2. Unchecked Bias – stereotyping, looking at information through an ethnocentric lens
3. Relying on Personal Experience - Using practice wisdom alone without research evidence
4. Judging the Reporter - Insufficient weight given to information from public/family/non-professional or too much weight given to the professional.

a. Assessor Stephens has requested and received two adult child references for applicant Williams. Ms. Williams’ son gave a glowing recommendation. Ms. Williams’ daughter did not recommend her mother be approved as a foster parent. She stated her mother worked outside of the home and therefore was not a good mother to her. Assessor Stephens agrees that mothers should stay home and raise their children. He has stated to you, his supervisor, that Ms. Williams, “Will not be approved as a foster parent under my watch.”

b. Assessor James has been to the Lorenzo family home three times. The first time, Assessor James noticed that Ms. Lorenzo had a very nice silver car. The second visit, a dent on the right front portion of the bumper was observed by Assessor James. When asked, Ms. Lorenzo indicated she had a fender bender at a local grocery store parking lot. At the third visit, Assessor James noticed a large amount of damage to Ms. Lorenzo’s bumper. When asked again, Ms. Lorenzo stated that the car in front of her hit their brakes hard to avoid hitting a deer. Ms. Lorenzo could not brake fast enough and struck the car. Assessor James returned to the office and shared what he observed with a co-worker. The co-worker said that clearly Ms. Lorenzo has been driving while intoxicated and is likely “a drunk.” Assessor James told you, his supervisor, that he will not be approving Ms. Lorenzo due to her substance abuse issues.

c. Assessor Whitte recently approved the Margon family. The Margon family has been impacted by infertility issues for the past five years. Assessor Whitte had a miscarriage previously and empathized with the family. Assessor Whitte grieved her miscarriage for a short time but returned to daily activities with little impact. During the homestudy, Assessor Whitte chose not to ask the couple clarifying questions regarding their infertility and how it will impact their ability to parent their adopted child. Today, she went with the Margon family to visit an infant who is available for adoption. The Margons seemed upset and awkward at the visit, and admitted to her afterwards they were disappointed the baby did not look like either of them.

d. Assessor Joss has visited the Miller family on two occasions. On both occasions, Ms. Miller has been listening to Christian music and reading the Bible when he arrived. Assessor Joss has witnessed Ms. Miller placing Holy Water on her children’s foreheads. Assessor Joss has real concerns about what he considers “extreme” Christianity and has focused all the assessment questions on the Miller’s religion. He has gathered minimal information on the Miller’s parenting skills, marriage, or motivation to adopt.
Errors When Drawing Conclusions

1. Incomplete Information - Formulating a hypothesis on the basis of incomplete information, drawing hasty conclusions

2. Conformation Bias - Ignoring evidence that disproves the hypothesis, having preconceived ideas and only looking at information that confirms your ideas

3. Letting Others Make The Decision – using the conclusions of an authority or the majority without drawing your own conclusions

4. Confusing Correlation With Causation – seeing two outcomes and concluding that one brought about the other

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a. Assessor Mendez has returned to the office after an initial visit with applicant Jopkin. He was told by Mr. Jopkin that he had a male roommate whom he has lived with for twelve years. Throughout the home, Mr. Jopkin and his roommate have photos together as any other family may have to reflect a significant relationship. Mr. Jopkin said that they have separate rooms and are not “together.” Based on the discussion and his observations of the pictures, Assessor Mendez has come to the conclusion that Mr. Jopkin’s roommate is his sexual partner. Assessor Mendez has also decided that Mr. Jopkin is helping his roommate to avoid him for some unknown reason. 

b. You reviewed the recent assessment of the Jones family written by Assessor Watson and noticed that most all of the sections were completed in second or third person. There were three sections of the assessment that were written in the first person. You asked Assessor Watson about the change in tense within the assessment. Assessor Watson admitted that because she was up against the deadline for completion of the Homestudy, she asked the family to respond to some of the questions through email and then had her intern write up the final document. She had reviewed the Homestudy and saw some problems, but figured you would flag any major issues.

c. Assessor Hill observed the Mitchell family in Preservice sessions. He decided they will be the best foster family of the current group and asked to be assigned their family assessment. At the first visit, Assessor Hill asked the family about any criminal or child welfare history. Ms. Mitchell reported having two DUI’s in the past six years but that she had sworn off alcohol and has been sober the last six months. Mr. Mitchell shared he had been investigated by a county after his neighbors witnessed an altercation with his daughter. The investigation cleared him. The Mitchell family was well-spoken and funny during the interview just like they had been in class. Assessor Hill told you, his supervisor, the information disclosed by family. He reiterated that he was lucky to be working with this family and that they would be great foster caregivers.

d. Assessor Kayhill is working with the Jenkins family, which includes Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins, Jeremiah (7) and Sierra (4). The Jenkins have three bedrooms, one for the couple and individual bedrooms for each child. At the initial assessment appointment, Mrs. Jenkins shared that she believes her children are happier than most children, as all family members co-sleep in the same bed regularly. At the next visit, Assessor Kayhill learned that Jeremiah had served a week’s detention at school. He fell asleep in class then gave the classmate who woke him a bloody lip. Assessor Kayhill reported this incident to you, her supervisor, and stated she believes Jeremiah is tired because he isn’t sleeping well at home. She also suspects he has been physically or sexually abused at home because of his violent reaction to being waked up.
**Self-Assessment**

Supervisors can share these questions with their assessors to help them determine when they may be in danger of making a critical thinking error (NSPCC, 2010):

**Gathering Information**

- Do I feel confident that I have the knowledge and skills I need to do this assessment?
- Am I documenting facts or opinions?
- Have I spoken with, and listened properly to, those who know the person better than I do?
- Am I remaining curious and inquisitive about what I am seeing and assessing?

**Evaluating the Information**

- Have I extracted the most important details from all of the details provided?
- Is there research to back up what I am hypothesizing?
- Have I fully explored all perspectives?
- Would I be prepared to change my mind about this assessment?
- What is my relationship with the person or family and how does this influence my assessment?
- Am I making efforts to check my biases and the possible biases of others providing information?
- Would I react differently if these reports had come from a different source?

**Drawing Conclusions**

- Am I open to new information, even if it dispels what I had believed?
- How confident am I that I have sufficient information upon which to base my judgements?
- Am I allowing myself to be persuaded by another or is this truly my assessment?
- Am I really considering all possibilities?
SUPERVISING ASSESSORS

The Steps in Difficult Conversations

1. Reflection
   • Think about what happened – who said and did what
   • Reflect on how the incident made you feel and what these feelings say about you
   • Identify your triggers

2. Decision
   • Does this need to be addressed? How will you feel about this in the future?
   • Identify your specific purpose for the conversation; what is the expected outcome?
   • Ask yourself, what is the best approach, timing, etc. to achieve my purpose
   • Is this a disciplinary issue? Do I need to meet with my supervisor or HR first?

3. Preparing
   • Consider why a reasonable, rational, decent person would do this
   • Do some self-reflection – consider what your role in the problem is, consider that you might see something in yourself you might not like
   • Prepare for the person’s reactions, plan how you’ll respond

4. Approaching
   • Share your purpose
   • Apologize when appropriate
   • Describe the problem as a difference in perspective or approach
   • Share feelings, make “I feel” statements
   • Identify the “third” story, no right or wrong, just different
   • Don’t spend a lot of time blaming and looking at what went wrong; talk about contributions, be explicit about what you need them to do differently in the future

5. Listening
   • Ask them to share their side
   • Listen for understanding
   • Use active listening skills
   • Acknowledge their emotions

6. Problem solving
   • Invite them to partner with you for a solution
   • Find agreement, then compare
   • Invent an option that meet both sides’ needs
   • Step out/take a break if emotions are running high
   • Look for standards to guide the decision
   • Develop a communication and action plan - who will do what by when

Steps adapted from Difficult Conversations, Stone et al., 1999, and Crucial conversations, Patterson et al., 2002.