

AHBMT Recommendations for Supervision

Liz and Kathrin have worked together and composed the following statement of policy on supervision, which is endorsed by the Executive Committee, in an attempt to clarify our position on supervision and where it is coming from. The document was submitted to the AGM and approved of by those present.

Our administrative policy is that in order for you to be on our Register, and thus available for us to make referrals to, we are legally bound to have your current supervision details, because we advertise our practitioners as 'being in ongoing clinical supervision'. If you are not currently practising but intending to start, get your supervision sorted out before you enter your name on the Register so that your arrangements are in place! The BMTC requirement for supervision is 14 hours per year, and we follow that. If you are not on the Register but are seeing clients, for ethical reasons we still require you to have supervision.

We are aware that for many people the word 'supervision' conjures up images of having someone breathe down one's neck, and of being monitored for mistakes and criticised. It appears that many people experience supervision as that - essentially a punitive exercise designed to correct their mistakes, and thus suggesting that they are not really to be trusted. No wonder that they will not undergo this more than they can possibly help!

We would like to sketch an alternative, where supervision is about having a place to talk about our work. It is also about having regular contact with senior colleagues who we feel safe with and can trust. We feel that supervisors should treat us with kindness and mindfulness and an awareness not only of our work but also of our person as a whole. Supervision provides the space where we can think and talk about how we feel about our work, about how we engage or do not engage with what we do, about what nurturing we get out of it or don't, and so on. It should attend, in truly holistic fashion, not only to our clients' process but also to our own development as professionals and as whole persons.

This is what it could be. Of course we realise that not everyone will experience such an idyll; but we do want to stress that if you don't feel happy with your supervision, that is not something you just have to put up with. It can and should be addressed, and we believe it is up to every practitioner to address it, and to try to make their supervision as good as possible. Do you feel safe with your supervisor? Do you feel seen as a whole person? Do you feel that your supervisor trusts you? Do you feel that you can be open and undefended in the way you present your work? Can you discuss the difficulties and dilemmas you are facing, and does that feel as though your supervisor is trying to help you gain clarity about problems without judging you? If you can't answer yes to these questions, talk to your supervisor. Consider changing your supervisor. Also ask yourself these questions before you choose a supervisor, if you already know any of the possible choices. Basically, you want a supervisor that you can allow to support you.

Group or one to one

One possibility that you might want to look at, if your supervision doesn't satisfy you, is that instead of having one-to-one supervision you could have group supervision; or conversely, if you are currently having group supervision, you might be happier in one-to-one supervision. Some people feel more able to share what they do in a group that involves some peers, and some people feel safer with just one person present. If you do not have any other supervision, we would recommend that the group be led by a supervisor if at all possible.

A good experience

If you can make supervision a good experience for yourself, you may find that the regulation fourteen hours every year sit very easy on you indeed. You may also find that you are able to hold more clients if you have good supervision (this is my reply to those who are worried about the cost of supervision - in my experience supervision is a good investment). This is especially true if you are just starting a practice and feeling very unsure of yourself: a supervisor is in an ideal position to give you the support you need for this difficult and scary venture.

All of us have come to biodynamic massage from other professions, other careers. Some of us have, like me, come to the training from experiences of previous professions that didn't work for them. For us, then, the issue needs to be addressed that we don't want to repeat a pattern of work that 'goes bad' after a while - we have a need to relate in a different way to how we work, and what we can do to make our work inspire and nurture us. Others have come to the training more out of a wish to add another string to their bow, to do something that speaks to a deep desire for the sort of contact with other people that biodynamic massage allows. For those (and for the rest of us!) the issue will be how to keep that desire alive, and how to make sure that at least some of it is satisfied as we work. I see these issues very much as something that belongs to supervision, and would regard it as part of my duty to my clients and myself to address them continuously.

Support

Where the AHBMT is coming from is wanting to support you. We are in the AHBMT executive committee because we have a very basic trust in your abilities and your professional integrity. We do advertise that our members work to high professional standards, and therefore we have to 'police' how you are organising your professional life once a year (when you renew your membership), and we honestly don't enjoy doing this. The rest of the time, thank goodness, we can be available to discuss more freely what problems you may be encountering. So please, please talk to us if you feel that you can't meet our requirements! It is a very painful experience to feel that someone is just quietly withdrawing from the profession because they feel that they are somehow not good enough.

Who should you choose for your supervisor?

We have talked at some length about this. It is not easy to formulate a simple policy for it, because different practitioners' needs are very different, and we are aiming to strike a balance between making sure that practitioners have well-qualified supervisors and giving them as wide a choice as possible. The best we can come up with is a sort of hierarchical scheme that starts from 'ideally', goes through a number of 'next bests' and ends with 'at a pinch'.

In the first two years after you start practising (this will often be after you have obtained your certificate, but if you are taking time out it could be later) you are still under the aegis of your training school, and they take some responsibility for you and your professional development. Therefore during that time they determine whom you can choose to be your supervisor, and how often you should meet. We fully support the schools' requirements for supervision for this period of time. This also means that you need to make your supervision arrangements through your school and not through AHBMT. The same applies to those who at the end of the two years are still in training in body psychotherapy.

The ideal

After that, you basically have to answer to the AHBMT for how you are organising your continued professional development. We feel that ideally you should be in ongoing supervision with an experienced UKCP registered body psychotherapist who is also trained in using biodynamic massage, as well as attending revision days or other further training. Your choice of supervisor will be somewhat wider than in the first two years, because the schools each have a list of recognised supervisors who answer directly to them, and these lists are not identical. There are also a number of senior people who are trained in the use of massage but don't use it in their practice and who are good supervisors. Kathrin is undertaking to keep an updated list of as many as possible of these 'first choice' supervisors, and to make this available on request.

If you cannot find an 'ideal' supervisor in your area, or do not get on with any of them, or have other supervision arrangements from other parts of your professional life, we will accept as your supervisor an experienced UKCP registered body psychotherapist who is not trained in massage (next best), or a UKCP registered integrative or humanistic psychotherapist (next best after that). We would in that case suggest that you explore the possibility of finding an individual or a peer group that you can discuss more technical questions with, and meet perhaps less frequently or only on an 'as needed' basis.

The requirement that your supervisor has to be a UKCP registered psychotherapist is pretty fixed. A counsellor, or an individual with a background purely in massage or some other complementary health discipline, is not an adequate supervisor. After all, biodynamic massage was conceived of, and developed, in a psychotherapeutic context, and we believe it would lose a lot of its essence if we go too far from that

background. You could also find yourself with a supervisor who simply doesn't understand what you are talking about. If you choose a psychotherapist whose orientation is very far removed from body psychotherapy (a psychoanalyst for instance), this can be an interesting experience, but it can also be confusing and undermining, and we do not really recommend it.

Peer supervision

If you have peer supervision, set up a few rules. Be aware that confidentiality must be maintained. It's good to make some boundaries around where and when and how you meet, so that it is always clear to everyone when you are having supervision and when you are having a friendly chat. Think about whether you want there just to be peers, or whether you want a senior supervisor to take the group.

'At a pinch'

The 'at a pinch' level consists of contacting one of us and letting us know what your individual arrangements are, if they do not meet any of the above. We may make suggestions for improving your situation if we feel that you are a bit unsupported. This will depend on your level of experience and on the whole of your professional and private circumstances such as where you live and how else you keep yourself connected to a sense of the living reality of your own and other people's work. We will try and do our level best to help you find an individual solution that is acceptable practically and financially and makes you feel good.

We believe that good supervision is about empowering you in your work. But it will only be that if you take responsibility to make it so. We would hope to be a potential resource to support this process.

At the AGM, this statement was felt to be supportive. It was pointed out to us that this constitutes a bit of a contrast with the present policy, or lack of, on further training and revision/study days. The present document does not address this area, but the Executive are undertaking to engage in a dialogue with the training organisations regarding further training opportunities and revision/study days. Thus we will hope to eventually arrive at a catalogue of professional support structures that meets members' needs and that they can identify with as much as possible.