

Appendix 11:

USING GENOGRAMS AS A SUPERVISION TOOL

Alongside chronologies, genograms are the single most useful tool for identifying inter-generational patterns of care and exploring how these influence the meaning, role and expectations of children for their parents.

They also focus the supervision firmly on the family and the child's needs. Genograms help workers develop a picture of the child and parents in a broad historical and relationship context in a way that can be easier than using computerised recording systems.

As a tool to support effective supervision, genograms enable supervisors to assimilate complex information about the family. Specifically, they can help to:

- Assist prompt identification of missing information
- Provide the opportunity for the supervisor to ask the worker what patterns of protective and risk factors are present in the current family situation, and in particular how these have been forged or changed across generations
- Create the opportunity for supervisors to ask workers how they engaged family members in reflecting on the impact of family history on their confidence and capacity to parent
- Enable supervisors and practitioners to work together exploring challenges or blocks in the social worker's relationship with family members; in particular identifying whether this relationship is mirroring any concerning or dangerous dynamics within the family system

Three practice points should be emphasised when using genograms in supervision:

1. Compile them together rather than simply reviewing one already on file. The process of working together will emphasise the collaborative nature of supervision and help you to understand how the social worker is feeling and thinking about the family
2. Remember that a genogram is far more than 'who is who' and 'who was who'. It's about the meaning of family members and their behaviours to each other, and in particular how this positions the expectations of, and care available to, the child.
3. Pay attention to the genogram's emotional impact on the supervisee. Unanticipated reactions may arise where family patterns and relationships 'push buttons' for the social worker.

Adapted from Wonnacott J (2011) *Mastering Social Work Supervision*. London: Jessica Kingsley)