

The Seven-Eyed Model of Supervision

The Seven-Eyed Supervision model was developed by Peter Hawkins and Robin Shohet in 1985, who integrated the relational and systemic aspects of supervision in a single theoretical model. The model is relational because it focuses on the relationships between client, therapist and supervisor and systemic because it focuses on the interplay between each relationship and their context within the wider system. The model is called “seven eyed” because it focuses on seven distinct aspects of the therapeutic process, as explained in the sections that follow. It’s important for supervisees simply to be aware of each of the “eyes” of the model, rather than learning each by rote. What follows is a guide to each of the “eyes” of the model.

Eye 1: Focus on the Client

It is all too easy to see our clients in terms of their problems and how they might solve them. In so doing, we block ourselves from being able to empathise with the client, even though we may have their best interests at heart – we subtly objectify our clients. Focussing on the client may help you become more attuned to their motivation, needs and desires in the here-and-now of the therapeutic relationship. It can be an effective way of empathising with the client – experiencing the therapeutic relationship from their perspective.

The following questions are examples of how to focus on the client’s experience:

1. How do they come into the room?
2. How do they sit?
3. How do they hold themselves?
4. How do they talk?
5. What might be their perception of you?

Eye 2: Focus on Interventions

Each of us only can only ever experience ourselves from the inside. That means there will always be aspects of ourselves that we are unaware of, things that only others see. Conversely, there are aspects of ourselves which we hide from others, and there are those which are hidden from ourselves and others. By focussing on the interventions you use with clients, you can discover hitherto covert aspects of your therapeutic relationships. You might begin by asking yourself the following questions to discover the hidden aspects of your therapeutic relationships:

*Do you use a certain kind of intervention more than others? For example, if you ask a lot of questions:

1. For whose benefit are you asking?
2. What are you trying to discover?
3. Why?

*What do you hold back and why?

1. Who are you protecting?
2. Who or what are you protecting them from?

*If you could switch off the part of your mind that filters what comes out of your mouth, what would you say to your client?

What does that tell you about yourself?

What does that tell you about your perception of your client?

What does that tell you about the therapeutic relationship with your client?

Eye 3: Focus on Client-Therapist Relationship

When you and your client sit together in a session, you create something greater than the sum of its parts: a relationship. The therapeutic relationship is created in the here-and-now by both therapist and client and, in my experience, it is the vehicle of therapeutic change. Although the quality of the relationship is often the deciding factor in the therapeutic outcome, it is nonetheless an intangible, ever-changing experience which can be difficult to describe. To help you get perspective on a therapeutic relationship, it can be useful to consider of the relationship creatively using metaphor, or by taking a perspective view of it. For example you might start by asking yourself questions such as:

If you were shipwrecked on a desert island with your client, how would you each behave?

What would you do straight away to survive?

Imagine you've now been on the island together for a month.

How are you each behaving now?

Think about your client's most recent session and imagine you are watching it as an observer.

What do you notice about the client and counsellor?

If you were both animals, what would you be? (E.g. "I'm a cat and my client is a mouse.")

How do you interact with each other? (E.g. "The cat is chasing the mouse! ... I think my client wants to run away from me ... I think she's scared ... I hadn't thought of it like that.")

What do you imagine is the transference and counter-transference occurring in the relationship?

Eye 4: Focus on Therapist's Process

You have the luxury of experiencing yourself from the inside. You know yourself better than anyone else, you are the expert on you. Your “process” is the sum of your moment-by-moment thoughts, emotions, sensations and behaviour (e.g. your body language) in response to your client. If you can gain awareness of your process, you may discover an invaluable stream of “data” that provides an opportunity to learn much about the client, yourself and the relationship between you that was previously unknown to you. For example, you can use awareness of your process to discover what within you may be hampering the therapy.

It is important to note that focussing on your own process does not mean interpreting what you know about the client, it is about attending to your own experiencing of yourself in the here-and-now. If you would like to explore the subject further, I recommend you read Chapter 7 in the book, [Experiencing And The Creation of Meaning](#), by Eugene Gendlin.

Questions to consider for Eye 4 include the following:

1. How do you feel emotionally in response to your client?
2. What are your physical sensations in response to your client?
3. What thoughts do you have about your client?
4. Notice your body language in response to your client. What are you saying through your gestures?
5. What do you imagine the client is covertly telling you? (E.g. “Please fix me”).
6. What are you covertly telling the client? (E.g. “I need to you to like me”).

Eye 5: Focus on Therapist-Supervisor Relationship

What happens in the counselling room may be played out between therapist and supervisor subsequently. This is often called parallel process. For example, perhaps the therapist becomes angry, or tearful, or petulant, etc, when talking about his client and discovers that in fact his client is experiencing those same emotions. Parallel process may be more subtle though: recognising when you feel bored, defensive, or other less obvious emotions can help you understand the client-therapist system better. Parallel process may also operate in reverse – the relationship between you and your client may mirror what happens outside of your awareness between you and your supervisor! The following questions exemplify the kind of enquiry that helps you recognise parallel process:

1. How am I similar to my client?
2. What am I holding back from my supervisor?
3. How do I regard my supervisor when I talk about my client?
4. How do I regard my client in the sessions immediately after supervision?

Eye 6: Focus on Supervisor’s Process

One of my tasks as a supervisor is to turn my attention to my own process similarly to how you as a supervisee turn your attention to your process, as described in Eye 4. Focussing on my process helps me gain insight into parallel process, the quality of supervisory relationship and my “relationship-by-proxy” with your client, which is how I imagine your client to be, how I imagine the therapeutic relationship to be, and how I imagine I might interact with them, were I in your place. My focus on my process can help us identify how our relationship

mirrors your relationship with your client in ways that would otherwise be unknown to you. For example, I sometimes find myself attributing feelings to the client that resonate well with my supervisee: "As you talk about your client, I notice I'm feeling very sad, I wonder how he might feeling?" "Yes, that's it, he does seem sad. He seems very sad". In this example, you can subsequently explore sadness with your client and allow him to let you know how he is feeling. Alternatively, we might discover that the sadness is mine, belongs to something in my past and has nothing to do with the therapeutic relationship, in which case I am able to recognise that I am bringing something into my view of the relationship which doesn't fit. Remember: When using Eye 4 and Eye 6, you and I are not interpreting for the client, we are focussing on our own processes.

Eye 7: Focus on Wider Context

The wider context is the current and historical background of the client-therapist-supervisor relationship and is comprised of two important types of influence, which can be called Stakeholders and Ghosts.

Stakeholders are those elements of the wider context which currently influence the relationship. For example:

1. The organisation you work for (e.g. EAP work).
2. The regulating bodies we each belong to (e.g. BACP, UKCP, etc).
3. Ethical frameworks to which we are bound.
4. The wider system of people and organisations (influences) in the client's life (e.g. partner, children, parents, GP, psychiatrist, probation service, keyworker, etc).
5. The wider influences in my life.
6. The wider influences in your life.

Ghosts are those elements of the wider context which are no longer present, but whose effects remain in the lives of you, me and the client. For example:

1. Schoolteachers.
2. Deceased family members.
3. Significant events.
4. Other people in our personal histories.

It could be said that the seventh eye is the most important, if you take the view that we are the sum of our experiences, past and present. An understanding of the external influences in the client-therapist-supervisor relationship can help you:

- Work through impasse – when the therapy seems to be going nowhere, is it due to the unacknowledged influence of a ghost or stakeholder? (e.g. a therapist might be afraid of making certain interventions because they have a Core Belief which tells them it would be wrong).
- Resolve ethical dilemmas (e.g. knowing whether or not a client is already in contact with their GP can help you decide when and how you might breach confidentiality).

- Identify common themes across your client work (e.g. are there certain consistent aspects of the way you experience your clients, as the result of your upbringing?)