



**Sexual Assault**  
DEMONSTRATION INITIATIVE  
Enhancing Sexual Assault Services

## CHANGE STARTS WITHIN

### STRENGTHENING SERVICES THROUGH SUPERVISION

***“A trauma-informed program values all people and their ability to transcend experiences of trauma. This approach is multidimensional and can be seen throughout the various spheres of an organization, including: organizational culture, services provided, and the individual staff, volunteer, and intern commitment to self-care and growth. A trauma-informed approach is demonstrated in a program’s mission statement, the sustainability of its work, the way a survivor is greeted on the telephone, the comprehensiveness of care provided, the safety and comfort of offices and meeting spaces, the commitment of an organization to staff wellness, staff attitude toward survivors, and staff commitment to self-care.”***

—BUILDING CULTURES OF CARE

A publication of the Sexual Assault Demonstration Initiative

Co-created and issued by the Resource Sharing Project, National Sexual Violence Resource Center, National Organization of Asians and Pacific Islanders Ending Sexual Violence, and the Minnesota Indian Women’s Sexual Assault Coalition

Advocacy work is beautiful and difficult. Supporting survivors of sexual violence means we advocates are exposed to the worst of humanity, in hearing about the violence, and the best, in witnessing how survivors find their ways to wholeness and happiness. Supervision rooted in resilience, honesty, and trust gives advocates the support and tools they need for this brave and beautiful work.

Our tools in advocacy are built from our emotions and knowledge. The art of advocacy comes in how we manage and apply those to our work. Supervision in sexual assault services helps advocates develop and hone those skills. Supervision helps advocates manage their vicarious trauma and, for many of us, primary trauma. Supervision helps leaders ensure that services are high-quality and in keeping with the program's values, ethics, and mission.



## PURPOSE OF SUPERVISION

The work we do is centered in resilience and healing from trauma. Good supervision guides advocates to keep their practice grounded in the program's principles and values, supports professional growth and skill development, facilitates smooth program administration, and helps advocates to manage and alleviate vicarious trauma and burnout.

Supervision happens all day every day; it is crucial to effective services. Supervision is how leaders communicate the tone and culture of the program, how feedback is given, and how anti-oppression is incorporated into daily work. Sometimes we think of supervision as an hour a week of individual check-in. That is one task of supervision, but it is so much more. Supervision is project management, providing tools for getting work done, addressing vicarious trauma, and creating good open communication. Supervisors are present with people and pay attention.

# TRAUMA-INFORMED SUPERVISION

Using a trauma-informed approach to supervision supports and guides advocates in using a trauma-informed approach to direct advocacy services. There are six aspects of trauma-informed supervision: cultural relevance, safety, trust, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Each of these aspects intersects with and reinforces the others.

1

## CULTURAL RELEVANCE IN SUPERVISION:

- Understand how our personal histories of privilege and oppression shape our approach to supervision and relationships
- Provide support and dialogue around supervisee's identity in relationship to survivors they serve
- Celebrate resilience and draw on cultural strengths
- Understand safety and vicarious trauma risks that are different for staff of color

2

## SAFETY IN SUPERVISION:

- Establish clear guidelines/expectations/norms for what supervision is and how it works
- Policies should be clear about what corrective action looks like; it's about growth and learning, never punishment
- Clear and frequent communication about the program, especially regarding changes
- Dialogue and support about physical safety

3

## TRUST IN SUPERVISION:

- Setting appropriate boundaries and expectations
- Listening and truth-telling (challenge directly, approach with curiosity)
- Following protocols on supervision consistently
- Show an understanding and appreciation of advocacy work





## 4

### **COLLABORATION IN SUPERVISION:**

- Develop shared meanings, especially of management, supervision, good service
- Include supervisees as early and often as possible in organizational changes
- Approach supervision as learning and exploring together; remain open, curious, and emotionally available
- Ask supervisees what they need

## 5

### **CHOICE IN SUPERVISION:**

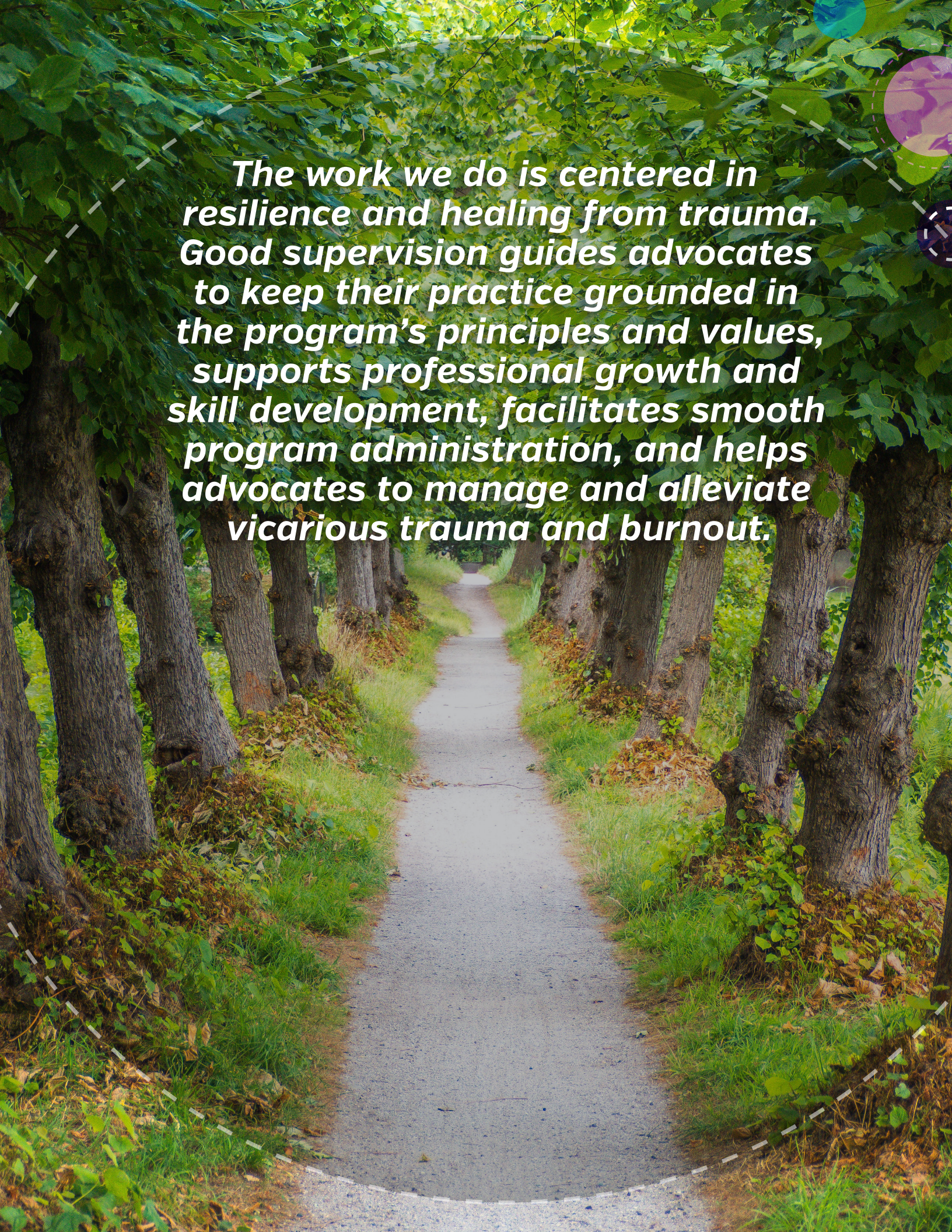
- Support supervisee's choice-making in their advocacy practice — set expectations and let them decide how to meet them. Work with supervisees on choices regarding caseload size and diversity.
- Be clear about organizational constraints on choices
- Support supervisee's choice-making in practical aspects of work: schedules, office décor, etc
- Help supervisees manage vicarious trauma through appropriate boundaries, such as reasonable work hours and tasks
- Ask supervisees what they need in terms of support, feeling valued, etc

## 6

### **EMPOWERMENT IN SUPERVISION:**

- Communicate respect for supervisee's abilities and appreciation of past performance. Validate their resilience and celebrate the whole person
- Provide realistic challenges that will support a supervisee's growth
- Provide training or access to it on all aspects of advocacy practice and vicarious trauma
- Provide transparency and information on grants and budgets



A photograph of a paved path lined with trees, viewed from a low angle looking down the path. The path is flanked by green grass and fallen leaves. The trees have thick, textured trunks and dense green foliage. A dashed white circle is overlaid on the image, framing the text. In the top right corner, there are several colorful circular icons: a blue one, a purple one, and a green one, all with dashed white outlines.

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## QUICK TIPS FOR BEST PRACTICES IN SUPERVISION:

- Hold regular, scheduled meetings to discuss advocacy practice and wellbeing. Ideally, this is provided every week or every other week. Agree on a regular time and place to meet, arrive on time, and protect against interruptions [e.g. turn off phone, close door].
- Give supervisees ways to access a supervisor for urgent questions.
- Provide regular and timely communication about the program—events, policy changes, etc.
- Supervisees' needs are sometimes best served by more than one person, and some folks have specific supervision requirements related to licensure. Explore options for additional support
- Supervisors need supervision too! Seek formal support for your professional growth and wellbeing as a supervisor.
- Job performance, work planning, and goal setting are a piece of supervision, but should be attended to in a separate structure and time. Your weekly/bi-weekly supervision time is to talk about supervisee's needs and weekly plans.



## REFERENCE

Resource Sharing Project, & National Sexual Violence Resource Center. [2013]. *Building cultures of care: A guide for sexual assault services programs*. Retrieved from <https://www.nsvrc.org/publications/nsvrc-publications-guides/building-cultures-care-guide-sexual-assault-services-programs>

View the recorded conversation here:

<https://campus.nsvrc.org/course/view.php?id=115>

Materials and resources available at [www.nsvrc.org/SADI](http://www.nsvrc.org/SADI) or

<http://www.resourcesharingproject.org/sexual-assault-demonstration-initiative>