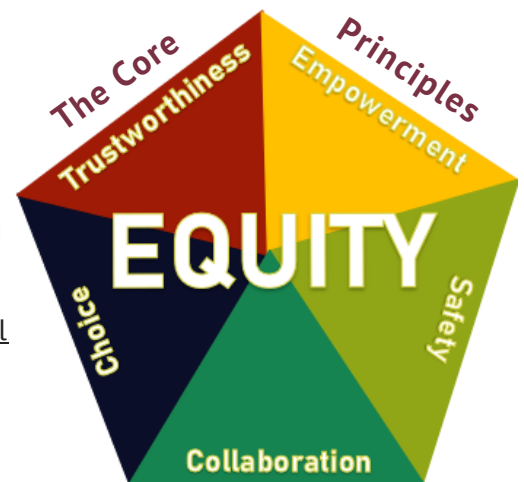


TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE SUPERVISION: DURING COVID-19 AND BEYOND



Collaborative problem solving among local, regional, state, and national stakeholders is helping our communities find balance and adapt during the COVID-19 response. Alive and Well Communities continues to provide practical supports and trauma-sensitive approaches to crisis management. We lend our thought partnership and helping hands to prepare vulnerable community members with needed information and resources. Through Facebook Live, we've provided daily doses of self-care support (#DailyDOS). Stakeholders have publicly pledged their commitment to Alive and Well's three action steps to resist racial re-traumatization. Institutions continue to request strategies and seek guidance for how to apply the trauma lens to service delivery and policy framing, including ways to engage in trauma-informed communication and decision making in schools. Alive and Well Communities continues to help organizational and community partners apply the principles of trauma-informed care to the virtual workplace and reopening of in-person service delivery.

This guidance document for organizational leaders and supervisors about trauma-responsive supervision aligns with the principles of trauma-informed care: **trustworthiness, equity, choice, collaboration, empowerment, and safety**. Due to COVID-19, life as we knew it has changed. The effects of such profound disruption will last beyond the moment society is "re-opened." It is one of the many crises our institutions and people have had to adapt to and manage. Organizations everywhere will have to provide supervision and support to staff during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond. The psychological needs people have related to loss and change must be considered when developing supervision processes, when planning how to execute supervision activities, and during supervisor-supervisee interactions.



The three supervision priorities highlighted in this guidance are relevant across industries. While this list is not exhaustive, the highlighted priorities are timeless. The supportive actions under each priority are designed to be accessible and applicable to many settings. The actions consider in-person work dynamics, social distancing and the use of home offices that are required for stay-at-home mandates. Because trauma affects us all and each of us can contribute to healing, this guidance is applicable to individual habits and organizational practices.

Supervision Priority #1: Provide Structure & Flexibility

- Maintaining a home office requires a balance of routine, boundaries, and resources. To achieve balance, sensitive supervisors support staff's ability to maintain a functional home office that meets production and sensory needs by providing technology and tools, information about how to work from home effectively, and other practical resources. Help staff maintain a sense of professional work life while also recognizing the blurred boundaries between work and home offices.
- Collaborate with staff to resolve the debate about if home-based workers should be required to keep a camera on their home office for surveillance by work supervisors.
- Ensure employees that work from home are aware of if they will be required to use video and audio during meetings. Advance notice will allow people to prepare their homes, outerwear, household members, and maintain choice about how they present themselves publicly.



@awcommunities



@awcommunities



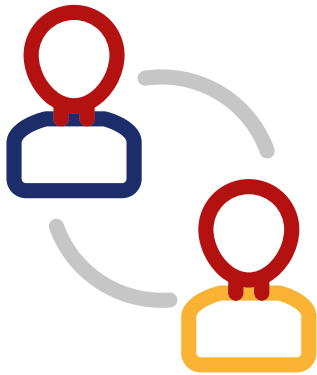
Alive and Well Communities



awcommunities.org

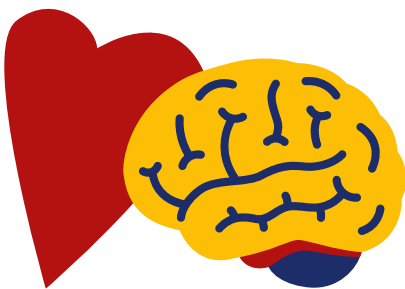
- Staff may be providing care to children and/or dependent adults while actively engaging in their outside-the-home career responsibilities. Frontline staff may need to more frequently check in with children or loved ones at home. Unexpected video conference visits from children, significant others, and pets can be a source of joy, a dose of humanity, and jolt of entertainment during otherwise tense times.
- During a crisis, as always, find a balance between needed frequency of engagement and meaningful relationship-affirming interactions. Maintain routinely scheduled events, create agenda items, and initiate check-in sessions that focus on wellbeing, too. As much as practicable, ensure meetings provide timely resources, include opportunity for employees to identify barriers and/or name pain points, co-construct solutions that address real-time needs and solve issues with productivity and service delivery.

Supervision Priority #2: Set Expectations & Manage Productivity



- We all need clarity as we navigate and manage several stressors and responsibilities. Repetition and reframing help clarify expectations and illuminate next steps. Apply the principle of collaboration to co-create understanding and mutual agreements with staff around work tasks, work pacing, reporting expectations, assignments, project plans and due dates.
- Apply the principles of trauma-informed care by ensuring productivity also accounts for opportunities to engage in relational connection, time to strengthen team building/connectedness (even virtually), providing resources to complete meaningful professional and personal development activities, and time to engage in self-care (including online opportunities). Ensure supervisors across the organization apply a humanized sense of productivity to themselves, too.
- Maintain high expectations while providing supports and flexibility to help supervisees be successful while they grieve, heal, and/or manage changes in household needs. Ensure those you supervise know that your confidence in their abilities and competence is not compromised because of their very human challenges. Being compassionate and approachable will help people feel safe enough to ask for help rather than suffer in silence while struggling publicly. Be prepared to adopt mutually agreed upon supportive practices and creatively adjust short- to long-range expectations about mutually beneficial outcomes.
- Just like in larger society, some staff are living paycheck to paycheck or other household breadwinners may have lost income. Hunger and financial stress can affect work focus and availability to meet performance expectations. Because people generally struggle with accepting help for basic needs, ensure some elements of support are universally available and anonymous, and, as required, other elements are personalized and private. Check in with staff to offer resources that meet their material, developmental, physical, social, and emotional needs.

Supervision Priority #3: Protect Staff Wellbeing & Enable Resilience



- Healing can begin when people are asked about their current state of being, simply have their voices heard and needs acted upon. Consider adding round-robin community check-ins to your staff meetings. Focus on active listening and developing interpersonal connections.
- Evaluate the types and amounts of services included in your employee assistance program (EAP). For the current and anticipated circumstances for your organization and community, assess if the EAP is offering the effective types and amounts of what employees need.
- Analyze current policies, processes, procedures, and resources to identify the extent to which they support grief processing and healing. Collaborate with staff and those served by the organization to identify needs and intentionally bridge resource gaps.



The leadership and managers of an organization are uniquely positioned to influence the type of climate and culture its people experience. Supervisors have the power to create an equitable culture where people thrive. Decision makers invite collaborative discussions about climate so that diverse talents can flourish. Institutional leaders and supervisors engage the organization's people to develop practices and structures that achieve business priorities and meet the emerging needs of those who drive the organization's results. Organizational leaders cultivate a system where individual gifts are honored and leveraged to make the larger community better. Decision makers who aim to develop trauma-responsive organizational culture, climate, and practices take leadership even further.

A trauma-aware organization recognizes that, according to research about the prevalence of trauma, over 6 out of 10 people reported experiencing at least one traumatic event that affected their ability to cope. In addition to their personal, community, and familial roles those people are employees and customers, too. By building an awareness of how trauma affects relationships and performance, supervisors can come to recognize the struggles employees and stakeholders may be experiencing. By responding supportively to the ways its own stakeholders are affected by trauma, an organization can become a place where healing and equity happen. Indeed, by engaging more with the psychological needs of employees, leaders and supervisors come to realize an organization must become responsive to the trauma of its people.

We offer organizational leaders and supervisors the following reflection questions as they carry out their duties to provide structure, set expectations, and protect staff wellbeing. These questions are applicable to COVID-19 and beyond.

1. **Recall a time when you were being supervised and felt the supervisor-supervisee relationship was ideal. What about the supervisor or organization made it ideal? What about you and your available internal/external resources contributed to the success of the relationship?**
2. **In which ways have the current circumstances (e.g. COVID-19, virtual workplace, physical distancing, work assignments, etc.) affected how supervisors and supervisees engage? What is the same? What is different? For example, think about the amount of engagement, timing, the specific methods of interacting, the topics/focus of the interactions, and/or employees' feedback about supervision encounters.**
3. **Reflect on the feedback you have previously heard from those you supervise and employees in general. Make a list of the supports and processes they have requested to enable their success. Which items on the list speak to relational connection, wellbeing, communication, and what supervisees state they need as they meet clear expectations? As you consider the necessary steps to deliver the requested supports, which components do you have power to implement? Which components can you commit to highlighting for action by other decision makers?**
4. **As you consider your answers to the three questions above, identify what should be maintained and what should be added in your current organization. Which aspects of supervision before and now align with trauma-responsive approaches? Which policies and other aspects of organizational practices will support using approaches to supervision that are requested and trauma-responsive? Which aspects of the organization will create barriers to implementing the requested and trauma-responsive approaches?**

Would you like to learn more about the principles of trauma-informed care? Are you wondering how to move your organization and your supervision practices from an awareness about the impact of trauma to being responsive to the impact of trauma? We invite you to connect with us to learn more about how to apply the principles of trauma-informed care to your individual practices, organizational policies, and institutional processes.

Alive and Well Communities activates communities to heal.

We do this together by:

- **Elevating community wisdom** centering those who have experienced trauma as leaders of the work.
- **Disrupting systemic oppression** and responding to the impact of historical trauma.
- **Acting with urgency**, not waiting for another day or generation.
- **Leading innovative solutions** based on the science of trauma, toxic stress and resiliency.



@awcommunities



@awcommunities



Alive and Well Communities



awcommunities.org