

Supervision of Balint Group Leaders and the Containing Function

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The Aim of this Poster is:

- to provide an overview of supervision for Balint group leaders as the result of the reflections in the working group on supervision within the IBF Task Force on Leadership
- to examine how supervision supports the leader's containing function in contemporary practice
- to collect personal experience in supervising leaders to fill in the blank of hardly any specific literature on supervision for accredited Balint group leaders

Background and Objective

Balint work relies on the capacity to receive, hold, and transform emotionally charged material. This need for containment appears on several levels:

- in the clinical encounter
- in the Balint group
- in the leader's own reflective functioning

Supervision may offer leaders a space to process difficult experiences, restore thoughtfulness, and sustain their capacity to lead.

Institutional and Conceptual Framework

According to the Guidelines on Leadership of the IBF Balint leaders should receive adequate and continuing supervision. ⁽¹²⁾

77,3% of IBF member Societies offer ongoing supervision for leaders, 90,5% are interested in supervision groups for leaders on IBF events. ⁽¹¹⁾

This positions supervision as an essential component of safe leadership, ethical practice, and continuing professional development.

In this perspective, supervision is a reflective space where leaders can

- maintain and improve competencies
- reflect difficult group situations
- refine leadership skills
- address ethical and emotional challenges linked to Balint group work

Motivations to seek Supervision

Possible motivations of a group leader to seek supervision:

- to have an opportunity to share difficult situations with peer leaders ⁽¹⁰⁾
- to help to contain whatever comes up in a group ⁽¹⁾
- to welcome conflicting ideas and let them circulate within the group ⁽¹¹⁾⁽⁸⁾
- to be able to tolerate contradiction and separateness ⁽⁶⁾
- to improve intervention and leading techniques ⁽⁶⁾

Supervision Methods

Methods for supervision of Balint group leaders may vary depending on the supervisor's orientation, didactical preferences and the chosen setting

- Some adopt an expert-based approach, providing insights and interpretation by using a variety of methods and techniques common in supervision.
- This method is suitable for single or group supervision
- Others use the Balint group method itself, using the group process of the supervision group to foster
 - associative thinking
 - mentalization resulting from the diversity of the group members
 - a better understanding of the dynamic of the group presented
 - a better understanding of the leader's problem presented

Supervision Settings ⁽¹⁰⁾

- During leadership training, through observation and co-leading
- As continuing supervision for accredited leaders
- In individual, group, in-person or online settings
- Event related supervision: workshops, congresses, leadership meetings

Qualification requirements for Balint group supervisors ⁽¹⁰⁾

Given the complexity and specificity of Balint group leadership supervisors for Balint group leaders should possess a high-level expertise:

A supervisor should

- be accredited trainer of Balint group leaders
- have extensive experience in leading Balint groups.
- be familiar with
 - psychodynamic concepts such as transference and countertransference, re-enactment and parallel processes
 - group dynamics
 - systemic theory

It can be helpful to have experience as a co-leader of an experienced supervisor in supervision groups or single supervision sessions

The Containing Function of Supervision

- The containing function refers to the capacity to receive, process, and transform raw emotional experiences into meaningful psychological material ⁽³⁾
- Secure the frame: Supervision provides a protected setting where difficult affects and troubling group situations can be expressed, shared and thought about ⁽¹⁾
- Reflective listening: it may support the leader's capacity for reverie, floating attention, and transformation of emotional material into thinkable experience ⁽²⁾⁽³⁾
- Symbolic boundaries: the supervision frame differentiates inside and outside, self and group, and reinforces psychological containment ⁽⁴⁾⁽⁵⁾⁽⁸⁾
- Peer connection and triangulation: supervision reduces isolation, broadens perspective, and may introduce a symbolic third position ⁽⁷⁾⁽⁸⁾
- Tolerance of conflict: it helps leaders remain open to contradiction, uncertainty, and negative affect without foreclosing thought ⁽¹⁾

• Practical Implications

- Supervision should be integrated into regular Balint leadership practice, not stay reserved only for moments of difficulty
- Supervisors need advanced Balint experience: strong group-awareness, sensitivity to transference, countertransference, enactment and parallel process
- Intervention / peer supervision as a special form of supervision can strengthen reflective community and ethical awareness
- Supervision using the Balint group method can emphasize the specificity of Balint work
- Supervision using the Balint group method may help leaders recover functional capacities after emotionally demanding Balint group sessions

Conclusions

Balint oriented supervision appears to provide leaders with containment, reduction of psychological distress and professional development

Reinforcing frame, listening, creating symbolic boundaries, peer connection and pointing out re-enactment and parallel processes in the supervision group may strengthen the leader's capacity to hold complex emotional processes, improve the understanding of the specificity of Balint group processes and sustain a high level of quality in Balint group work

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