

Case Example within a **Developmental/Ecological Problem-solving Model (DEP)** of Supervision

The following case example illustrates the practical applicability of the DEP Model for guiding the supervisory process. Sally, a school psychology intern in a high school placement, is approached by Pauline, a student she has begun to work with in a counseling support group. Pauline shares serious concerns about a friend, Mary, who has been depressed and begun talking about wanting to die. Pauline remembered that the school's universal suicide prevention program had addressed the important responsibilities that peers had for assisting each other when friends discussed harming themselves. **This prevention program encouraged students to approach a trusted staff member or one of the presenting psychologists to share concerns about a friend in crisis.**

Pauline informs Sally that she is afraid for her friend but worried she will be angry at her for talking about it with a school staff member. She asks Sally what she should do. Sally reassures Pauline that her concerns are valid and important and that she has taken appropriate action to seek help regarding her friend. **As they discuss Pauline's concerns further, it becomes clear to Sally that this is a potentially serious situation requiring further assessment and intervention.**

She convinces Pauline to attempt to bring Mary in to see her together, making suggestions about how to encourage Mary, emphasizing how impressed she is with her concern for her friend, and noting that joining her in the meeting will make Mary feel more comfortable. While expressing confidence that Pauline's support will be successful in bringing Mary in for a session, Sally reassures her that she is committed to reaching out to Mary even if she is hesitant. **Sally notes that she is in training as a psychologist, supervised by Ms. Grace Jones.** She tells Pauline that she wants to make sure she is doing everything possible to be helpful to her and Mary and will

Comment [DS1]: E: Intern participates in systemic program that attempts to impact the culture of the school.

Comment [DS2]: PS: Actively engaged in problem-solving activity

Comment [DS3]: D: As per Contract, Intern identifies self as trainee and identifies supervisor and her role.

be consulting with Ms. Jones who may join them for the meeting to provide additional expert support.

Sally is in the second month of her internship. During the assessment stage in the development of her internship plan, Sally and her supervisor determined that one of her training goals would be to become more proficient in counseling skills. She has studied suicide assessment at the university but has never actually conducted a risk assessment. Her internship contract specifies that all concerns related to student safety must immediately be brought to her supervisor's attention. Right after meeting with Pauline, she contacts her supervisor to share the contents of this interview and consult about how best to proceed. Grace takes time to review the situation with Sally and confirms that she has taken the correct action steps. Grace reviews the process of engaging in a suicide risk assessment and outlines the best way to proceed including planning ahead for following up with Mary's parents. Given the nature of the case, Sally's experience level, and the early stage of the internship, Grace decides she will join Sally in the session with the students. She encourages Sally to take the lead noting that she will lend support and ensure that the risk assessment is thorough and accurate.

Sally and her supervisor meet together with the girls. After Pauline expresses her concerns for her friend, Sally asks Mary if she would like Pauline to remain in the meeting for further support or whether she would like to explore these concerns privately. Still anxious about discussing these issues with unfamiliar school staff, Mary asks Pauline to stay for support; and the assessment process ensues. While Mary does not appear to be at immediate risk for self-harm, it is clear that she is clinically depressed and requires therapeutic intervention to address multiple concerns. She reports a recent break-up with a boyfriend, intense conflicts with her mother, significant academic difficulties, and some growing alcohol use "to try and take a break

Comment [DS4]: D: Entry level assessment of intern skills levels defines focus of training. Contract specifies actions to be taken in risk-for-harm situations. Supervisor provides direct instruction in suicide risk assessment (multi-method supervision). Supervisors provides formative feedback. Given critical nature of assessment and intern's early stage of training supervisor will sit in next session.

Comment [DS5]: E: involving peer in intervention.

from my problems". When Mary initially resists Sally's recommendation that they meet together with her mother, Grace becomes more active. She skillfully models an approach that not only achieves cautious agreement from Mary, but prepares her to appropriately share her concerns directly with her mother with their support.

In a follow-up supervision session, Grace and Sally review the content and the process of the interview. They examine the content of Mary's disclosures and compare it to empirically supported suicide assessment protocols. The impact of the empathic interview and her friend's support and the dynamics of Sally's emerging relationship with Mary are processed. Grace guides Sally through a summary review of the interview exploring the connection between the data gathered and the decisions required for follow-up interventions. While Grace provides Sally with specific feedback and suggestions, she fosters her intern's self-reflection. She repeatedly encourages Sally to share both her internal process during the session and her reflections on the intervention skills she demonstrated. They then plan the structure and approach for their upcoming meeting with Mary and her mother. Finally, they summarize what other information and data would be required to begin to plan an intervention for Mary's depression and engage her in a multi-dimensional problem-solving process. They conclude the supervisory session with a review of their own process of working together. Grace and Sally comment on the dynamics of their co-therapy and the effectiveness of their postvention review. Grace asks her intern if she has any further questions or needs at this time or any additional feedback regarding the supervisory process in this instance.

Documentation of student contacts is particularly important in circumstances like a suicide risk assessment. Grace directs Sally to draft a summary documentation of this intervention and share it with her. She in turn will document the supervisory process for her own records.

Comment [DS6]: D: Welfare of client is highest value; supervisor becomes more active to ensure positive outcome.

Comment [DS7]: D: modeling as part of multi-method supervision

Comment [DS8]: E & PS: Involving parents recognizes the need for a systemic intervention. This whole sequence is an example of problem-solving activity.

Comment [DS9]: PS: focus on evidence-based strategies

Comment [DS10]: D: Feedback and facilitation of self-monitoring

Comment [DS11]: PS: specific practice in problem-solving

Comment [DS12]: D & PS: processing the dynamics of their supervisory relationship is an important aspect of intern development and also models collaborative problem-solving processes.

Comment [DS13]: D: Importance of accountable recordkeeping

This case review illustrates the dynamic range of supervisory practice in school psychology. Within this single sequence, the supervisor engaged in multi-method supervision including direct instruction, modeling, co-therapy, live observation, and summary case review. Complex developmental, ecological, and problem-solving dimensions of this case were addressed as they applied to the student's welfare, the context of her relationship to parents and peers, and the professional skill development of the intern towards competence in suicide risk assessment (e.g., Cramer, Johnson, McLaughlin, Rausch, & Conroy, 2013).

Developmental Considerations

In this example, the developmental perspective provided the supervisor with a framework for balancing her intern's training needs with the client's welfare. The supervisor prepared her supervisee for a critical intervention, provided her a developmentally appropriate level of responsibility, engaged in direct observation, modeled intervention strategies as a secondary co-therapist, facilitated processing the interaction, provided constructive feedback, and guided initial planning for problem-solving.

Ecological Considerations

Ecological considerations were evident on many levels. From the very beginning interventions were planned to address the individual and accompanying contextual factors. This student requires individual support for coping with her depression; but her debilitating affect cannot be remediated without attention and intervention in relation to familial, peer, and academic contexts. This systemic focus begins immediately with the joint session with her supportive friend and directly engages her mother's involvement at the outset of the intervention sequence. It will later need to address her academic stressors. Further assessment might indicate a need to address her involvement with peers that encourage underage drinking. This ecological

Comment [DS14]: D: Multi-method supervision appropriate to case and developmental level of intern.

perspective places Mary's issues with depression in context, provides a realistic picture of the complexity of the problems, and points to the multiple intervention targets required for effective problem-solving.

Problem-solving Considerations

The formal assessment of the student's suicidal risk and the identification of overwhelming stressors began the assessment and problem definition phase of the problem-solving domain. It can be anticipated that the session with the student and her mother will provide important insight into the nature and intensity of the student's depression, potential intervention requirements, and resources and barriers to change. Separate strands of intervention strategies need to be explored to address depression management, development of adaptive coping skills, resolution of family conflicts, healthy peer engagement, and academic support. Within each strand, the supervisor will guide the intern in collecting baseline data, choosing and implementing targeted EBI strategies, and monitoring the outcomes of their efforts.

© Dennis J. Simon

6/21/13; 12/11/14

(Case illustration explicates DEP Model delineated in: Simon, D.J., Cruise, T.K., Huber, B.J., Newman, D.S., & Swerdlik, M.E. (2014). Supervision in school psychology: The developmental/ecological/problem-solving model (DEP). *Psychology in the Schools*, 51(6), 636-646.)