

The role of the supervising social worker in foster care: An international literature review



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What we will cover

The aims of the Rees Centre

The background to the literature review

What the evidence tells us about the role of the supervising social worker (SSW) in foster care

Recommendations for policy, practice and research

Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education

The Rees Centre aims to:

- identify what works to improve the outcomes and life chances of children and young people in foster care

We are doing this by:

- reviewing existing research in order to make better use of current evidence
- conducting new research to address gaps
- working with service users to identify research priorities and translate research messages into practice
- employing foster carers and care experienced young people as co-researchers

The Rees Centre is funded by the Core Assets Group

Background and research questions for the literature review

- Importance of the SSW role
- What do SSWs do, and what are the components of supervision and support they offer foster carers?
- What contributes to effective supervision by social workers of foster carers?
- Does the quality and/or quantity of support and supervision offered to foster carers, by SSWs impact on: outcomes for foster children; stability of placements; retention of foster carers?
- What we did

What do foster carers value?

- Emotional and practical support from their SSW and fostering service
- Being trusted, respected and valued
- Reliable, available SSWs, particularly at times of crisis, or stress
- Levels of contact with SSWs
- Home visits and telephone contact
- Support around problematic contact
- Respite
- Manageable SSWs workloads

How can SSWs enable foster carers to be active members of the 'team around the child'?

- Involvement in decision making and planning
- Foster carers within the professional network
- Trust, respect and being valued by SSWs
- Effective interpersonal communication
- Sharing information
- SSWs knowing the foster child
- Help managing troubled behaviour
- Joint training

Additional findings from the literature review

- Foster carers' views regarding SSWs and foster children's social workers
- Relationships between SSWs and foster children's social workers
- Placement disruptions and support
- Supervision of SSWs
- Independent fostering services and public fostering services
- Retention of foster carers linked to the quality and quantity of the support
- Social work education and training

Recommendations for policy, practice and research

- SSW caseload management to ensure effective direct work with foster carers
- Supervision of SSWs to enhance their role
- Practice guidance on the SSW role
- The SSW and the personal and professional development of foster carers
- Enhancing the relationships between SSWs, foster children's social workers and foster carers
- Social work education and training to include foster care knowledge and skills
- Research about effective SSW practice
- **What else?**

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How you can be involved

- Register expressions of interest in being involved in future possible research projects;
- Come along to lectures & seminars;
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- Web - <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/>;
- Comment on our blog – or write for us;
- Follow us on Twitter - @ReesCentre