

A Humanitarian and Social Justice Approach to Systemic Supervision

Evidence of systemic thinking.

As a trained family systems therapist, I am systemically oriented in my theoretical approach to conceptualizing, assessing, and intervening in the therapy room. Early family systems theorists hypothesized that stability in systems is attained through feedback loops that serve to regulate dynamics within and between those systems, otherwise known as cybernetics or circular causality (Lee & Nelson, 2013). As a systemic theorist and clinician, I understand that family systems theory aims to understand and emphasize sets of intrapersonal and interpersonal interactions needed to maintain the autonomy and adaptability of systems. I understand that systems must not only work for their own internal homeostasis, but that they also need to respond to external contexts to adapt. Through that they can create a higher level of functioning. I understand that this theoretical approach must therefore be ecosystemically and contextually oriented (less dominated by the medical or psychological models) in that, perceived dysfunctions are not solely attributable to or residing in individuals, but also related to relational dynamics across multidynamic ecological systems (Lee & Nelson, 2013).

I understand that this paradigm of family systems thinking is applicable to how I interact with and support my supervisees, because in order to maintain a sense of autonomic and adaptive relationship with them it is important to understand the current functioning and future directions of our relationship. Additionally, I want to approach my supervisory roles from humanistic and post-modernist viewpoints, which are highlighted by processes of unconditional positive regards adapted to fit supervisory methods (Hawkins, 1985), and social justice principles informed by narrative supervision frameworks (Kahn & Monk, 2017).

Clarity of purpose and goals for supervision.

My supervision approach is primarily oriented towards helping supervisees integrate perspectives and understanding of overlapping dynamics of systems thinking, humanistic matrix, and social justice as a result of systemic oppression, and how they might show up in supervision, in therapy, in their relationship with clients, and in their relationship with me. But I understand that the purpose of supervision will change depending on the context (Kahn & Monk, 2017). As such, I understand that I will need to continue monitoring the balance between these systems through regular reviews and appraisals of individual and collective goals. I understand that I have to collaborate with all these systems to adapt goals to changing dynamics, for my supervisees, for myself, and between me and my supervisor mentors, which Lee and Nelson (2013) refer to as falling on a continuum of “directive to collaborative” relationship. It is important that I conduct interviews with my supervisees to determine their goals for supervision and that I regularly follow up to update those goals. I understand that I must collaborate with my supervisees and supervisor mentors to prioritize short-term and long-term goals (Lee and Nelson, 2013). Additionally, I want to create a sense of safety so that my relationship with these dynamics are not only good fits, but also based on mutual understanding of the rules governing our contract.

Clarity of supervisory roles and relationships.

As I start to establish rapport with different systems in my supervisory role, it is important that I work to create and maintain good relationships with all aspects of those systems, including with my supervisees and supervisor mentors. I must develop supervision qualities that are not only reflective of my role as a therapist, but also of the role of my supervisees as therapists, and their unique relationship with their clients. Hawkins (1985) says of that process that “a good supervisor like a good counsellor must possess the qualities of ‘empathy, genuineness and non-possessive warmth.’” (p. 72) While he highlights that the process has to be adaptive, he also believes it to rely on a spectrum of interventions fitting themes of “Prescription, Information, Confrontation, Catalytic, Cathartic and Supportive.” (p. 72)

I understand that my roles as a supervisor include promoting diversity and advocating for social justice for myself, my supervisees and their client, but also for the community at large (Kahn & Monk, 2017). I therefore want my role and relationship with my supervisees to be safe and flexible enough to allow space to make mistake and to experience challenges. I want my roles and relationships to allow for the opportunity to freely collaborate on changing goals and the opportunity to revisit them as necessary. It is imperative to differentiate between helping my supervisees to learn and doing the work for them. That said, it is also important and appropriate to explore aspects of my supervisees’ personal life if it impact clinical or supervisory work, without resorting doing therapy with my supervisees as explicitly prohibited in the [AAMFT Code of Ethics](#), under section 4.2.

Evidence of supervisory contracts, and of evaluation of trainees and self.

I understand that I must enter an explicit and collaborative contract with my supervisees and my supervisor mentees to avoid potential ethical dilemmas (Lee and Nelson, 2013). I know the importance of the self of the therapist and supervisor. I am committed to be aware of my biases and how it may interfere with supervision dynamics. I am aware that my supervisees have many roles and that they will incorporate the-self-of the therapist or supervisee in sessions. It is my intention to be aware of those realities and know how to address them accordingly as recommended under section 6, in the [Approved Supervision Designation Standard Handbook](#). I am aware that the self of the therapist is crucial in psychotherapy, and I understand that it is a tool to help accomplish effective psychotherapy and not to be turned into therapy/supervision session for my supervisees or into my own therapeutic sessions (Kahn & Monk, 2017).

Evidence of awareness of personal and professional experiences that impact supervision (e.g., person of the supervisor).

I understand that I have to maintain higher standards of ethics and avoid conflict of interests as stated under multiple sections (e.g.: 2.7, 3.4, 4.2...) of the [AAMFT Code of Ethics](#) (Lee and Nelson, 2013). I understand that as a therapist and supervisor, the self-of-the therapist and the person of the supervisor will surface in session and supervision. I understand that I cannot turn session or supervision into my own, but know that if use either, it is to solely benefit

my supervisees and require that I am clinically trained to objectively use them (Kahn & Monk, 2017).

Preferred supervision model or practices and their connection with the candidate's own therapy model.

I understand that I need to continually attempt to encourage fluidity through a collaborative, humanistic and social justice approach. I will work through issues of systemic oppression and ecological dynamics that might maintain oppression and prejudices with my supervisees (Kahn & Monk, 2017). It is important that I collaborate with my supervisees to maintain a strong working alliance to encourage mistakes, explore challenges, celebrate successes, and develop professionally (Lee and Nelson, 2013). I understand that I need to clearly discuss theories and modalities of practice with my supervisees to make sure we are compatible, or that they are comfortable working with me regardless of my orientations.

Evidence of sensitivity and attention to contextual factors such as developmental phase of the trainee, training setting, culture, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, age, sex, gender, economics, and so forth.

I will pay attention to the developmental phase of the trainee and training setting. I will pay attention to all the dynamics of these settings and impact on training arrangements (Lee and Nelson, 2013). I will be mindful of the intersecting implications of cultural background and intersecting identities. I want my supervisee to embrace their uniqueness and sense of identity and I want to promote their cultural uniqueness while creating a safe space for our dynamics (Kahn & Monk, 2017). I want to be aware of my limitations and biases, and work on developing power with my supervisees and not hold power over them, as remarked under section 4.1 of the [AAMFT Code of Ethics](#).

Familiarity with modes of supervision (individual/group, case consultation/live/audio-video, and technology-assisted).

I understand the need to create a system of check and balance that help maintain a fair and functional dynamic between me and my supervisees. I understand that I will hold myself to high standards and put in place systems to monitor those standards. I will pay attention to my supervisees' progress and needs by creating operational systems intended to address any gaps and/or change (Hawkins, 1985).

I understand the advantages and disadvantages of group supervision versus individual supervision. I am aware of power differences and the need for good communication skills, goals setting and adjustments. I am aware of differential needs and the risk of time monopolization by certain members of group supervisions. I understand limitations with time distribution and the need to have group supervision structured in a way that benefit the group. I am aware that personal items will come up and that there is need to be mindful of their implications (Kahn & Monk, 2017; Lee and Nelson, 2013). In my agency we will be primarily doing in person

supervision and adapt as necessary. Any adaptation could present in the form of audio-visual or alternative telemedicine. I understand that alternative means of supervision can complicate the effectiveness of the supervision process and I will do due diligence to address any issue that arises. I understand that some of supervisees might need special accommodations and I will collaborate with them to address their needs to assure that all the tools are present to create a conducive learning environment for everyone involved.

Evidence of sensitivity to and competency in ethics and legal factors of supervision.

I will regularly review the [AAMFT Code of Ethics](#) with my supervisees. I will invite my supervisee to discuss dilemmas and explore ways to deal with them effectively (Lee and Nelson, 2013). I understand that we will do repairs as appropriate when these things come up, and that I will take steps emphasizing collaborative, humanistic and social justice approaches, like unconditional positive regards and cultural sensitivity (Kahn & Monk, 2017), when formulating resolutions.

Awareness of requirements for AAMFT membership, regulatory agencies, and the standards for the Approved Supervisor Designation.

I understand that I need appropriate training to supervise therapeutic work (Hawkins, 1985). I am aware of the need to be a current member of AAMFT and of the requirement to complete the AAMFT approved supervisor designations to qualify as a supervisor candidate. I am aware that I need a 30-hour course, 36 hours supervision mentorship and 180 supervision hours (Lee and Nelson, 2013). I understand that I will need to remain curious and adapt to changes and take continuing educations to maintain certifications and develop further skills.

References

- Hawkins, P. (1985). Humanistic Psychotherapy Supervision: A Conceptual Framework. *Self and Society (London, England)*, 13(2), 69-76. <https://10.1080/03060497.1985.11084674>
- Kahn, S. Z., & Monk, G. (2017). Narrative Supervision as a Social Justice Practice. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 36(1), 7-25. <https://10.1521/jsyt.2017.36.1.7>
- Lee, R. E., & Nelson, T. S. (2013). *The contemporary relational supervisor*. New York, NY : Routledge.