



This is one of a series of Guides written by AC members who are experienced practitioners and wish to share some of their learning and perspectives with other members.

How do you find a supervisor?

By Michelle Lucas, AC Supervision Education Lead

The simple answer to this question is to take a look at the AC directory where you will find a list of members who provide Coaching Supervision. Whilst a useful starting point, this doesn't answer the important question: "How do I find the best Coaching Supervisor for me, right now?"

As a professional coach you will probably always engage in some kind of supervision and it can be helpful to experience a number of different supervisors over your coaching journey. So the best starting point is to consider what your supervision needs currently are, including:

Practical Considerations

- Do you want to work face-to-face or are you happy to work remotely via videoconference or telephone?
- Do you want supervision one-to-one or as part of a group?
- If you want to work as part of a group, is it important that the group membership is fixed or would you be comfortable if it were to change each time you met?
- How often do you want to take part in supervision?
- What is your budget?

Professional Considerations

- What's your previous experience of receiving coaching supervision and how does that inform what you are looking for now?
- What kinds of topics do you believe you will be taking to supervision – and how will you want to be supported in the supervision discussion?
- What underpinning knowledge or theory informs your work – and how important is it that your Coaching Supervisor comes from the same or from a different perspective?
- Is it important that your Coaching Supervisor is a trained, qualified, accredited professional? Or would you be inclined to engage with a peer for supervision?

FAQs

Where do I find a good supervisor?

The AC has a directory of members who are supervisors. Some are AC Accredited Supervisors, whose work has been assessed as aligning with the principles, competencies and functions of supervision outlined in the AC Supervision Principles.

Some supervisors choose not to become accredited, so it's important that you do your own research on which supervisor is best for you.

Where can I get an experience of supervision?

The AC offers members Groups Supervision calls to provide an experience of supervision members. More info on the [AC web site](http://www.acweb.org). To book: e-mail karenb@associationforcoaching.com

Do I need a supervisor if I already reflect with a colleague?

Reflecting on client work with colleagues can be very helpful especially when you create a formal contract for the activity. It is, however, different from reflecting

Psychological Considerations

- How clear are you on what supervision is and how it might help you?
- What is your motivation for supervision? Is it because you have been advised, because you wish to become an accredited coach, or because you are wholly committed to it for your learning and development and to ensure you can be the best practitioner possible?
- What do you believe you will need from your Coaching Supervisor in order to feel safe enough to display your vulnerability and thoroughly explore your client work?

There are some big questions here, and if you are completely new to supervision then they may generate additional ones! Here are some comparisons to help you consider the variables:

The pros and cons of individual versus group supervision

| Benefits of individual supervision | Benefits of group supervision |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clear licence for you to be selfish with your needs• More time available to “deep-dive” into the topics you bring• Supervisor can track your development over time | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Diversity of input from the group• Opportunity to learn through others’ topics as well as your own• Greater sense of connection to a community |
| Limitations of individual supervision | Limitations of group supervision |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supervisor’s perspective may be focused and offer a narrower input than a group• May be considered an intense experience• Typically more costly than group supervision | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less flexibility on logistics• Less time for your own topic• Group dynamics can impede learning if not handled well |

The benefits of working with a fixed or a flexible group

| Benefits of working in a fixed group for supervision | Benefits of working in a flexible group for supervision |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More likely to experience a sense of psychological safety• Peers can help you spot themes, patterns in your approach and development needs | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greater variety of input over time• Less likely to dip into “group think” as there will be fresh dynamics in each session |

with a supervisor, who has specific training and who can offer greater impartiality and challenge. It’s great to have both!

Questions you could ask a potential supervisor:

- What do you enjoy most and least about being a supervisor?
- What kind of things do you take to your supervision?
- What theories and philosophies inform your work?
- How much work do you do as a coach (therapist/counsellor) as well as a coach supervisor?
- What do you expect me to do by way of preparation for supervision?

What NOT to do when searching for a supervisor!

- Don’t choose a supervisor with whom you have a dual relationship - it complicates things! If you wish to gain AC accreditation as a coach you cannot use a reference from a supervisor who you have another relationship with, e.g. as a colleague.
- Don’t choose a supervisor because you secretly hope they might open some commercial doors for you. It’s important that neither party exploits the relationship.
- Don’t choose a well-known supervisor just because you think they will raise your profile in the coaching community. If this is your motivation look for a mentor.
- Don’t work with a supervisor who doesn’t engage in regular reflective practice with a supervisor themselves.

The pros and cons of supervision with a qualified supervisor versus supervision with a peer

| Benefits of working with a qualified supervisor | Benefits of working with a peer supervisor |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can expect the supervisor to help you leverage your learning They may have specific expertise that would be useful to share The supervision is recognised for the purposes of AC Coach Accreditation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May feel like a safer place to start your supervision journey Reinforces your personal responsibility for your own reflective practice Exchange is normally time not money |
| Limitations of working with a qualified supervisor | Limitations of working with a peer supervisor |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You need to make a financial commitment If they are not an active coach themselves, they may lack connection with the reality of working as a coach (which of course could also bring some useful objectivity!) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> May create developmental stagnation Unlikely to be sufficient on its own May not be recognised for the purposes of AC Coach Accreditation |

The benefits of working with a supervisor with a similar or different background to yourself

| Benefits of working with a supervisor with a similar background | Benefits of working with a supervisor from a different background |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to embed and further develop existing learning Easier to connect and integrate new learning Likely to have similar underpinning values helping rapport to build quickly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely to generate good discussion, challenge & new learning Relationship may stay fresh for longer Tone is likely to be collaborative as different perspectives are compared and contrasted |

How will I know if someone is the right supervisor for me?

Most supervisors will offer you a sample session before asking you to commit to a contract with them. This allows you to find out whether you have good rapport and seem to communicate well. Remember however, that good supervision requires a combination of support and challenge, good rapport is not just about feeling comfortable. After an initial session you may wish to ask yourself:

- Do I feel safe enough with them to open up and be vulnerable? Or do I anticipate that there will be some things that it would be difficult to bring?

Are there specific competencies that a supervisor should demonstrate?

The AC has developed a framework of principles and competencies for the purposes of Supervisor Accreditation. Like any framework each Supervisor will deliver these in a way that is authentic to them:

Competencies:

- Demonstrates psychological mindedness
- Facilitates the process
- Ensures ethical and professional behaviours for the benefit of the coach's clients
- Supports the wellbeing of the coach
- Demonstrates credibility as a coach
- Enables value creation for clients and their stakeholders

Plus two more for supervisors who work with groups:

- The ability to surface and manage group dynamics
- Competence in facilitation skills

These competencies are underpinned by the following principles:

- To keep at the core of their supervision the purpose of developing the capacity for reflective practice in their supervisee
- To do no harm, by recognising boundaries and staying within the limits of their competence
- To ensure the client receives the best possible service at all times, this to include the individual coachee and where it applies the sponsoring organisation

- Do I feel they will “call it” if I have missed something? Or do I sense they are likely to let me off the hook?
- Do I believe they will stretch my thinking at a pace that is appropriate for me? Or am I already worrying that I could quickly get out of my depth?
- Am I already identifying questions that I want to explore with them about my work? Or do I feel confused about how they will bring value to my practice?

How long is a supervision relationship likely to last?

You are likely to benefit from multiple supervision relationships over the course of your coaching career. This is much more possible now than it was, say, five years ago. More people are training as Coaching Supervisors and remote working is becoming increasingly popular, so connecting with supervisors outside our own geography is increasingly common.

If you’re starting your coaching journey it can be helpful to start supervision with someone who has a similar training to your own. You’ll experience how supervision works and develop your confidence and skill at being a supervisee. Once you have a stronger sense of your needs (and can answer most of the questions posed at the outset) then you are in a good position to experiment with different approaches to supervision.

How can I tell if I need to move on from my current supervisor?

Signs that your supervision relationship may have passed its best include:

- De-prioritising supervision in your diary and frequently re-scheduling appointments
- Feeling weary or disinterested in what you’ll bring to supervision
- Believing you know how your supervisor will respond to what you bring, or that they tend to help you in the same way each time
- Noticing you have plateaued in your own coaching work

One or more of these signs does not necessarily mean you need a new supervisor. However, I would suggest that you discuss what you’ve noticed with your supervisor. You may find ways together of boosting your relationship or it might become apparent that it’s time to move on. Either way your supervisor may be willing to help you work through what is going to be right for you next. If for some reason they are not, then it may be helpful to find a temporary supervisor to support you to do that thinking.

[For more detailed information take a look at the AC Website](#)

About the Author

This article was written by Michelle Lucas, AC Accredited Coach and Accredited Coaching Supervisor. Michelle volunteers her time as the AC Supervision Education Lead.



Michelle runs her own independent consultancy, Greenfields, delivering coaching, coaching supervision, coach training. She recently co-authored “Coaching Supervision: A practical guide for Supervisees” published by Routledge.

Other AC Member to Member Guides

Developing your Coaching through Reflective Practice.

What’s so super about Supervision?

Other Guides to be added to the series soon.

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Do you have experience which you would like to share with other members in a Member to Member Guide please contact sarah@associationforcoaching.com with an outline of your proposed Guide.