

# MTAI Guidelines for Mindfulness Supervision

A living document, working for the integrity of mindfulness teaching in Ireland.

The following details of mindfulness supervision are presented:

1. Context and Purpose
2. Guiding Sources
3. Mindfulness Supervision Defined
4. Foundational requirements for Supervisors
5. Responsibilities, Competencies and Tasks of Supervision
6. References

## 1. Context and Purpose: Why Guidelines for Mindfulness Supervision? As

mindfulness-based teaching continues to grow in breadth across the globe, guidelines for best practice reflect a commitment to upholding the integrity and fidelity of mindfulness-based approaches. Mindfulness-based supervision is an emerging field internationally and these guidelines are presented as a living document that will continue to develop.

The MTAI supervision guidelines are provided and understood in the context of existing MTAI standards, ethics and teacher-training guidelines that state “*Supervision is required, either individual or in a group, with a suitably qualified mindfulness supervisor, whilst teaching MBSR or MBCT programmes*”. The purpose of the supervision guidelines is to detail requirements for supervisors and supervisees as members of MTAI.

## 2. Guiding Sources

These supervision guidelines are informed by the following key sources:

- BAMBBA Good Practice Guidelines for Supervisors of MTIs
- The Mindfulness Network Supervision Good Practice Guidelines
- Evans et al (2014; 2018) Framework for Mindfulness-Based Supervision
- Key Supervision/Learning references (see page 3 footnote for examples)
- Supervisors Association of Ireland
- MTAI standards and ethical code
- International Integrity Framework (2017)
- MTAI Members Supervision Survey Report (2020)

## 3. Mindfulness Supervision Defined

Definitions are offered to bring about a shared understanding of what is meant by key concepts. Much like ‘mindfulness’ itself, definitions of ‘supervision’ are in abundance and span an extensive body of research. Supervision may be defined as a process, a relationship, a set of activities, roles, tasks and functions or goals. The variety of definitions of supervision reflect the specific needs for different contexts. Mindfulness supervision joins this body of work and shares the common functions of support, education and feedback. The MTAI supervision sub-group 2020 co-crafted the following definition, offered as a starting point, for the specific context of mindfulness teaching:

*“Mindfulness supervision is a regular, safe and co-created restorative space that is held within the container of mindfulness and contracted between supervisor and supervisee. Embodying a compassionate presence and through mutual inquiry, the supervisory process enables reflection on the supervisee’s mindfulness teaching practice and balances the supportive, educative and ethical strands of mindfulness teaching and practice. The process is dedicated to deepening the growth, understanding, integrity, safety and effectiveness of the integration of mindfulness, both personally and professionally, in the supervisee’s working life.”*

#### **4. Foundational Requirements**

The foundational requirements for supervisors providing mindfulness supervision are understood across 3 key areas:

- 4.1 Mindfulness teaching training and experience
- 4.2 Mindfulness supervision training and experience
- 4.3 Specific context training and experience

A foundational assumption is that supervisors and supervisees meet and adhere to the standards and guidelines of the MTAI. The following key components are MTAI guiding requirements for supervisors:

##### *4.1 Mindfulness Teaching Training & Experience: Supervisors*

- maintain an active personal mindfulness practice
- engage in the ongoing teaching of and/or training in mindfulness-based courses
- have taught, with full teaching responsibility - as a minimum - nine specific 8-week mindfulness-based curricula over a period of 3 years
- receive regular supervision, in line with MTAI standards or other relevant organisation, of teaching mindfulness, its relationship with personal practice, if supervising others, supervision of this work, which is sometimes called ‘supravisoin’
- attend retreats, yearly, as guided by MTAI to maintain personal mindfulness practice
- are committed to CPD by keeping up-to-date with the evolving evidence-base for mindfulness-based approaches and deepening understanding of mindfulness-based supervision, diversity sensitivity, assessment approaches, clinical and neuroscientific perspectives and understanding of foundational teachings from relevant spiritual and philosophical traditions

##### *4.2 Mindfulness Supervision Training & Experience: Supervisors*

- have completed CPD training in mindfulness supervision practice, for a minimum of 3 days, that incorporates theoretical underpinnings of current theories of supervisory practice
- are receiving supervision and guidance in deepening mindfulness practice, personal and professional
- commit to ongoing CPD specific to supervision (i.e. beyond the entry 3 days)
- recognise mindfulness supervision in its various formats of group, individual and peer; online, telephone and in-person.
- work with a model of supervision that is inquiry-led and mindfulness-based and grounded in a range of classic and contemporary supervision models and learning

theories<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.3 *Specific Contexts, Training & Experience: Supervisors*

- are required (either in the initial contracting stage or as soon as possible thereafter) to identify their own limits in terms of specialist knowledge, context, experience and personal practice
- agree with supervisees, in the supervision contracting process, that any responsibility for clinical governance remains with their employing organisation and the associated team structure within which the supervisee is working
- limit supervision to non-clinical aspects of mindfulness practice (i.e. attending to principles of integrity of mindfulness teaching) unless appropriately clinically trained and specifically contracted with supervisee. For example, where relevant, supervisees will receive separate supervision for the clinical aspects of their work.
- support supervisees who are novice teachers in following the fidelity of the curriculum in which they have been trained (e.g. understanding practices and teachings specific to MBSR/MBCT)
- provide monitoring or external evaluation of supervisees' work to a third-party only when specifically contracted and with parameters agreed in advance with the supervisee, as part of a mindfulness-based certification pathway

**5. Responsibilities, Competencies and Tasks of Mindfulness Supervision** As a relational activity, supervisees and supervisors enter into a mutually agreed contract that clarifies the responsibilities of supervision, its structure, administration arrangements and how the work will proceed, be reviewed and recontracted. This section outlines Responsibilities, Supervisor Competencies and Management of Supervision Work that is considered when contracting for mindfulness supervision.

##### 5.1 *Responsibilities of Supervisors & Supervisees*

- Secure professional indemnity insurance for mindfulness teaching, practice and supervision
- Attend to boundaries of time and co-create a safe and trusting climate for exploration and learning to occur including uncovering blind spots and bias in teaching
- Set clear boundaries of confidentiality, privacy and practice
- Avoid dual relationships: for example, the mindfulness supervisor shall not have any other therapeutic or working relationship with the supervisee during the period of supervision.
- Acknowledge and attend to the experience of power differentials in the supervisory relationship
- Ensure a lived relationship of respect, with an openness and a willingness to work mindfully with exploitation or discrimination processes if/when they may arise.
- Commit to self-care practices
- Supervisor engages in supervision of supervision (i.e. supervision) and of their

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the experiential learning model of Kolb (1984), the transformative learning model of Mezirow (1991), the developmental model of Stoltenberg & Delworth (1987), the systemic reflective model of Davys & Beddoe (2010), the therapeutic alliance model of Bordin (1979), the functional model of Inskipp & Proctor (1993; 1995), the passionate process model of Shohet (2008), the mindful supervision approach of Ryan (2008) and mindfulness-based supervision models of Cooper et al and Evans et al (2018).

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## 5.2 *Supervisor Competencies*

- Develops and maintains a safe and trusting working alliance with supervisees. This includes a willingness to explore difficulties within the alliance if/when they emerge and/or use supervision to inform decision-making about discontinuing supervision where the alliance has not and is unlikely to be established
- Creates an encouraging and challenging learning environment where the formative, normative and restorative functions of supervision are balanced as needed
- Supervises from an embodiment of personal mindfulness practice and an inquiry-led perspective that facilitates supervisee learning
- Mentors the development of the supervisee's personal practice and relates this to the work and life of the supervisee
- Enables supervisee to present appropriate supervision material and to use supervision effectively
- Supports the supervisee in identifying strengths and needs and provides feedback that facilitates new learning.
- Where agreed can utilise recognised reflective tools such as MBI:TAC for assessment of skills and experience<sup>2</sup>
- Offers constructive feedback that is encouraging, transformative and appropriately challenges practice that is not in keeping with professional standards and ethics
- Conducts supervision in varying formats (group, individual, telephone, online etc)
- Can incorporate into supervision the direct observation (in person or through video recordings) of supervisee's mindfulness teaching
- Engages in reflection on their own work as a supervisor and mindfulness teacher, identifying their own training and supervisory needs
- Seeks and receives honest feedback from supervisees through regular mutual review of supervision arrangements and experience
- Acknowledges the mutual learning experience in supervisory relationships

## 5.3 *Management of Supervision work*

A contract of work is drawn up and agreed by supervisor and supervisee. At least one supervision session is needed to consider the following elements of such a contract:

- The nature of the work, context and specialist skills in the work are discussed (e.g. general population, chronic pain, mental health, corporate, education, mindfulness teacher in training etc.)
- The organisational context and boundaries are discussed (HSE, voluntary, private practice, education etc.)
- Sharing each others' experience and expectations of mindfulness practice, the process of supervision and the supervisee's developmental needs as teacher
- The model and approach of supervision adopted by the supervisor is named and how this is operationalised in practice including sharing practice and inquiry in sessions
- The priority focus of supervision that may include reflecting on experience of teaching,

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<sup>2</sup> MBI:TAC refers to the Mindfulness-Based Interventions: Teaching Assessment Criteria, developed by Crane et al (2010; 2018) to reflect and assess mindfulness-based teaching integrity and fidelity

learning teaching skills, exploring cultural context, group and individual processes, theory and understanding of mindfulness teaching and integration with life-long meditation and personal practice

- Sharing of short personal practice within supervision sessions (making time to share a practice and inquire into the practice together)
- The cost, payment arrangements, frequency and format of supervision sessions, arrangements for cancellation and regular review of the supervision contract are detailed

Practitioners with extensive experience of mindfulness personal practice and teaching may be recognised as supervisors by the MTAI as fulfilling the fundamental conditions necessary to provide skilful supervision of mindfulness teaching.

## 6. References

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