



REFERRAL REGISTRY  
*of Washington State*

## **Effective Supervision**

A Guide for Employers of  
Individual Home Care Providers

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This manual was designed to support consumers/employers in their crucial role as supervisors. Employers play an important part in the Home Care Quality Authority's (HCQA) efforts to improve the quality of in-home care in Washington State. For more information about HCQA, visit [www.hcqa.wa.gov](http://www.hcqa.wa.gov)

HCQA wishes to thank the numerous individuals across the state who have helped to define and develop a comprehensive supervisory curriculum that will support the needs of both employers and workers in Washington's unique in-home care system of services. Much of this curriculum was adapted from the rich resources developed by the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute—guidance from Peggy Powell helped shape this course.

Finally, HCQA applauds you, the employer, who has stepped forward to take on a leadership role and learn more about how to be an effective supervisor. Being a supervisor to in-home services workers is an important role. This manual was designed to support you in your role as a supervisor.

Your commitment provides much-needed support to newer workers who may experience isolation and stress in their important day-to-day work. Thank you for your willingness to take on this crucial role, your commitment to make a difference, and your knowledge and expertise which you so freely share.

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## INTRODUCTION

We are glad you want to learn more about supervising your individual provider. You already manage the day-to-day details of your in-home services and want to learn more in order to keep good staff. By participating in this course, you will build upon your skills to supervise others.

### Background

The Home Care Quality Authority received a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to start operating Home Care Referral Registry Centers (HCRR). These HCRRs provide a number of services to recruit and retain individual providers, including employee recognition and peer mentoring.

The HCRRs also operate a Referral Registry, a database of people who have already passed a background check and are willing to provide in-home services.

A Referral Registry Coordinator is available to help you find individual providers. The Referral Registry is operated at a Home Care Referral Registry Center (HCRR) in your area. HCRRs have staff and other resources designed just for you.

***Call them at  
1-800-970-5456***

Manuals that are available from HCQA for Employers of Individual Providers include:

- How to Hire and Keep Good Staff
- Effective Supervision – self-study training using this manual
- Effective Communication – self-study training using this manual

## **Training Committee**

People from all over Washington told HCQA what kinds of training it should offer. Workers, employers, case managers, advocacy groups and others provided guidance about courses, skills and knowledge that would improve long-term in-home services.

A committee of experienced employers spent four months developing these courses. The committee meets regularly to plan upcoming courses and to provide information on how to improve supervisory training. A larger group of people edited this manual and gave input on how to improve it.

## **About This Course**

For many people who use in-home services, the key to being able to live independently is effectively managing their own care. For some people, independent living would be difficult without the physical assistance of another person.

Independent living means that an individual has the right to make his/her own decisions and to have control over the direction of his/her life. Directing and managing your own care with the assistance of an individual provider is a good example of independent living.

This course was created especially for people who employ individual providers (or “personal assistants”) in their home. It was designed to:

- help you, the employer, effectively supervise staff
- give you with the necessary skills to solve problems

This course provides many examples and suggestions to improve your skills as a supervisor. These are merely guidelines—information for you to consider.

## DEFINITIONS

### Employers

People who employ individuals to provide in-home services are sometimes called consumers or clients. In this course, we will use the term “supervisor” or “employer” because it recognizes and validates hiring, training and supervision responsibilities.

### Individual Providers / Employees

People who provide in-home services are sometimes called personal assistants, aides, caregivers or workers.

### Case Manager

Case managers (or social workers) are usually employed by the Department of Social and Health Services or an Area Agency on Aging. Case managers help determine level and amount of in-home care services by using a care plan. They authorize payment for your worker and can terminate service contracts when needed.

### Care Team

Any person identified in the care plan is considered part of the care team. Social workers, doctors, individual providers, therapists, home health aides, nurses and family members who provide service to you are examples of people usually found on the care team. The people listed on your care plan typically share information about your services or any change in conditions.

### Personal Assistance Services

Personal Assistance Services means any sort of assistance (human or technology) that people with disabilities rely on to make their lives more personally and professionally productive.

### **A Word of Caution**

You may use the terms *personal assistant, aide, caregiver, worker* or *individual provider* when referring to your staff. It is important to know that some people may not like the term you choose. You should find out from your staff which term they prefer.

Likewise, you should be very clear to your staff which term *you* prefer them to use when referring to *you*.

#### One person told us:

“Often, people with disabilities are referred to using terms such as *my patient, my client, or, he’s a quad*. Be clear to your staff that using these terms is not respectful of you as a person.”

## WHAT A SUPERVISOR DOES

Effective supervision has these four major benefits for in-home care services:

- Keeps employees longer (*retention*);
- Defuses conflict (*better working environment*);
- Improves problem solving (*better working relationship*); and
- Improves the likelihood that the needs of both the employer and the employee will be met (*empowerment and satisfaction*).

**TIP:** A good supervisor manages and supports their workers in a way that helps them develop problem-solving skills. This helps workers to think critically, prioritize tasks, and communicate effectively.

In your home, being a good supervisor also requires a relational approach to supervision—this means *creating a relationship* is vital to the job of being a supervisor AND to the job of being an individual provider.

Creating a working relationship of mutual trust and respect improves the likelihood that the needs of both you and your worker are met.

In traditional supervision, you learned to identify problems, offer solutions and explain consequences if someone broke the rules. In relational supervision, you do this in a way that maintains the working relationship—meeting your needs and your employees needs in the process.

More description about traditional supervision and the relational approach to supervision are located on pages 11-18 of this manual.

## Roles of a Supervisor

Your role as a supervisor includes many functions. Some of these functions are crucial to you, but not to another person. This depends on a number of factors, like the tasks, the capabilities of your employee, and the needs of you, the employer.

Determining your most important supervisory functions helps you to understand your role and helps you to create an ideal vision of your job as a supervisor.

### ACTIVITY: ROLES OF A SUPERVISOR

**Directions:** Circle six to eight roles you consider most important.

Develop	Motivate	Empower
Provide Feedback	Reinforce	Support
Guide	Set Goals	Influence
Develop problem-solving skills	Ensure Tasks are Completed	Help Think Through Personal Problems
Advise	Correct	Model Accountability
Explain What to Do	Tell What NOT to Do	Confront
Inspire	Listen	Direct
Discipline	Discuss	Mentor
Create or Maintain a Working Relationship	Maintain Clear Performance Standards	Advocate for your needs
Reflect	Discuss	Observe
Provide Perspective	Share Expectations	Praise

**Self-reflection — spend a few moments thinking about these questions:**

- Why do you consider the roles you chose important?
- How do the roles you chose play out in your work as a supervisor?
- Does anyone you know do all these roles all the time?

When completing this activity, people often create a picture of what they consider the *ideal* supervisor. An ideal supervisor is different than an effective supervisor because most people cannot achieve their ideal vision on a *daily* basis because several obstacles arise.

In-home care services has a unique set of obstacles because of:

- the personal nature of the work,
- the close relationships that develop, and
- medical conditions or medication.

***Sometimes, my barriers to being an ideal supervisor are:***

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The barriers you just identified are real, not imagined. Don't feel bad that you can't be an *ideal* supervisor all the time—nobody can! An effective supervisor knows their own strengths and weaknesses and learns to use those strengths and weaknesses wisely in day-to-day interactions with staff.

The first step to becoming an effective supervisor is to know your own strengths and weaknesses. Since you've identified what you think an ideal supervisor looks like, and those things that happen that get in the way of being an ideal supervisor, spend a few moments thinking about what you need to overcome your barriers and improve your skills.

***I can do the following to be an ideal supervisor more often:***

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**EXAMPLE** - One person might have said:

*My Barriers Are:*

*Providing Feedback...I need a lot of time to think about how to handle a problem. Later, it is awkward to bring it up again because we're working on something else.*

*I Can Do the Following:*

*Tell my worker that I'd like to talk to them at the end of their shift. Make a short note to myself about what I want to talk about—i.e., what the problem was, and how we could correct the issue.*

**Example of Progressive Discipline in the Home:**

- Tell worker what the problem is; help find solution
- If problems continue, give verbal warning
- If problem continues after verbal warning, let worker know they could be let go if their job performance does not improve
- If problem still persists, find a back-up plan (staff) and terminate the worker

While some supervisory functions, such as disciplining staff, may feel negative to you, they are all necessary parts of effective supervision.

As you develop a relational approach to supervision, the “negative” aspects of supervision will actually produce more positive results because the number of disciplinary problems will decrease over time.

## TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO SUPERVISION

Supervisors have a powerful impact on workers' lives. A worker's relationship with his or her supervisor is often the most influential factor in whether the worker feels valued and respected at work.

***Both you and your employee need respect and to feel valued.***

Not surprisingly, feeling valued and respected is one of the biggest factors affecting a worker's decision to stay on the job or quit.

### Challenges Affect Supervision

Your job as a supervisor is challenging because it can be demanding and stressful. You may have received little or no training to be a supervisor. New employees may have little work experience; they, too, may have little or no training.

Dealing with problems such as repeated lateness, no call/no shows, and negative or uncooperative attitudes can consume a significant portion of your time and energy.

Although blaming workers for poor performance is tempting, it is helpful to remember that low-wage workers, particularly those new to the workforce, often have few resources or limited experience to fall back on when the complexities of caring for their families conflict with the needs of the workplace.

**One person told us:**

“Remember to keep your priorities at the forefront—be careful about falling in the trap of always meeting the needs of your workers because this puts your own needs behind theirs.”

There is a high turnover rate among newly hired individual providers. Given the complexities of many workers' personal and work lives, individual providers often need support in developing the communication and problem-solving skills required in a demanding workplace. Effective supervision in your home recognizes these challenges, but still holds

workers accountable to what you expect them to do. You will play a major role in helping your employees to learn and grow personally and professionally and succeed on the job.

By completing your online training, you've learned that the five steps of the traditional approach to supervision are:

- Identify issues to be addressed;
- Explain the rules clearly;
- Explain the consequences of breaking the rules;
- Offer possible solutions to the problem; and
- Request or direct the employee to comply with work rules.

Below is a scenario that demonstrates all of the traditional approach to supervision steps. Read the scenario and answer the questions at the end.

### SCENARIO: Traditional Approach to Handling a Chronically Late Employee

**Supervisor:** Okay, Helen, you know I've called asked to talk to you because we have a problem with your being late.

**Worker:** Yeah, well, I thought so.

**Supervisor:** So I have written down here that in the past two weeks since you started working, you came in at 3:20 on Tuesday, you came in at 3:50 on Thursday, and then just this past week, on Tuesday, you came in at 4:08. You know this is a problem, right, Helen?

**Worker:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, I guess.

**Supervisor:** When you first started, we went over how important it is to be on time. You know that I have to have a worker cover all shifts and that the person who works the shift before you leaves at 3:00. If you're not here on time, there is no way the other person can leave. And because you start your shift late, there's no way everything that has to be done can get done. You know that, right?

**Worker:** Mm-hmm.

*(continued on next page)*

**Supervisor:** So Helen, what's the problem here?

**Worker:** (Sighing) The buses—at least three times a week—the buses are not coming on time. I'm there, most of the time—there for the right bus that should get me here on time—by 3:00. But a lot of times I'm waiting there 10 or 15 minutes, waiting for the bus to come. The bus is just killing me.

**Supervisor:** So the problem is the bus.

**Worker:** Yeah.

**Supervisor:** Well, you know that it's your responsibility to get here on time. And if your experience is that the bus is not getting you here on time, then Helen, you are going to have to do something about it. Which means that you are going to have to get a ride with somebody, go on another bus route, or take an earlier bus.

**Worker:** Well, I, ummm...

**Supervisor:** Are you willing to do that? Because your willingness to do that is an indicator of whether you're willing to do what it takes to stay in this job.

**Worker:** I'll try. I just. . .sometimes it might be hard for me to get an earlier bus. But I'll try.

**Supervisor:** Helen, I need more from you than that you'll try. I need to know that you're willing to do this, because you need to be here at 3:00. If you continue to be late, we might want to talk about changing your shift.

**Worker:** I'll take care of it. Don't worry.

**Supervisor:** Okay.

**Worker:** You going to fire me or something?

**Supervisor:** I'm not going to fire you. I'm going to assume that you'll keep to your word and that you'll take care of it and be here regularly at 3:00.

**Worker:** It won't be a problem anymore.

*(END OF SCENARIO)*

**Write down how each step was demonstrated in the scenario:**

1. Identify issues to be addressed.

2. Explain the rules clearly.

3. Explain consequences of breaking the rules.

4. Offer possible solutions to the problem.

Request or direct the worker to comply with work rules.

**Self-reflect on the scenario:**

- How would you usually approach this problem?
- How would you approach this if you are stressed or have negative feelings about the worker?
- In the scenario, the supervisor didn't dwell on the specific issue of tardiness. Instead, the supervisor focused on the relationship between the worker and the supervisor.
- Do you think the worker felt respected in the scenario?
- What chance do you think this supervisory intervention has of resolving the issue (tardiness) and retaining the worker?

**Putting it all together**

One strong suggestion about communicating well is to not attack the *person*, but to address the *behavior*.

In *traditional* supervision, the important things to remember are to identify the problem, offer a solution and explain the consequences.

The *relational approach* to supervision means that you do this in a way that maintains the working relationship; ensuring your needs and the employee's needs are met.

## SUPERVISION IN THE HOME

### Relational Approach to Supervision

Workplace relationships are one of the most important contributors to how people feel about their jobs. In particular, relationships are at the heart of work with people who are elderly, chronically ill, or living with disabilities.

A number of studies have shown that the opportunity for relationships with consumers draws workers to home health and long-term care—and the quality of relationships with coworkers and supervisors keeps them in their jobs.

The relational approach to working with employees uses effective communication skills to build positive supervisor–worker relationships and stronger problem-solving skills.

The relational approach differs from the traditional approach because of its emphasis on helping workers develop problem-solving skills and in the way supervisors behave toward workers.

You benefit from the relational approach because you'll see increased efficiency, delivery of better quality of care, a more positive working relationship, and a better environment for your home.

TIP: While the traditional approach to supervision is widely-recognized, the unique in-home care services setting benefits more from the relational approach to supervision.

Ways in which supervisors can build and maintain relationships while supervising staff include:

- Offer praise as much as possible. This validates the worker and the job they do.
- When addressing a problem, talk about how the issue affects you. This validates you as a supervisor *(example: "When you are late in the morning, I start my day late, too. I depend on you to get me out of bed, to the bathroom, and dressed.")*
- When offering solutions, explain how the solution meets the employee's needs and your needs. This validates the importance of both of you *(example: "If you take an earlier bus, you aren't rushed when you get here and can do a great job because you have the time you need. The other employee can get home to her family on time and I'll have your assistance when I need it the most.")*

The relational approach to supervision takes more time in the early stages.

Sometimes you will feel frustrated at how much effort it takes to build healthy working relationships.

In the long run, this investment pays off because you will retain workers longer and eventually you will spend less time dealing with problems.

Your employee benefits from the relational approach because they are more likely to have more positive feelings about themselves and you.

Individual providers are more likely to stay on the job when they experience these positive feelings.

The five basic steps to the relational approach to supervision are:

- Create a work relationship with the worker;
- Clearly present the problem;
- Gather information about the worker's perspective;
- Engage in problem-solving with the worker;
- Help the worker commit to action steps.

### **Comparison of Traditional and Relational Approaches to Supervision**

#### **TRADITIONAL SUPERVISION**

- Identify issues to be addressed.
- Explain the rules clearly.
- Explain consequences of breaking the rules.
- Offer possible solutions to the problem.
- Request or direct the worker to comply with work rules.

#### **RELATIONAL SUPERVISION**

- Create a relationship with the worker.
- Clearly present the problem.
- Gather information about the worker's perspective.
- Engage in problem-solving with the worker.
- Help the worker commit to action steps.

Below are several quotes from the earlier scenario. The examples show how the relational approach to supervision is different from the traditional approach to supervision:

### **Traditional Approach**

Okay, Helen, you know I've called asked to talk to you because we have a problem with your being late.

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Well, you know that it's your responsibility to get here on time. And if your experience is that the bus is not getting you here on time, then Helen, you are going to have to do something about it.

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Are you willing to do that? Because your willingness to do that is an indicator of whether you're willing to do what it takes to stay in this job.

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I'm not going to fire you. I'm going to assume that you'll keep to your word and that you'll take care of it and be here regularly at 3:00.

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Helen, I need more from you than that you'll try. I need to know that you're willing to do this, because you need to be here at 3:00. You should consider this a verbal warning. If you're late again, you'll be written up for it.

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### **Relational Approach**

I've asked you to meet with me because you've been late a few times the past two weeks. I imagine that something must be going on for you that is creating this problem, and I'd like to hear about it.

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So, Helen, clearly you have a problem in terms of being able to rely on the bus. I don't have to ride the buses myself, so I haven't had to deal with that. That must be really difficult for you. But on the other hand, I'm sure you appreciate how important it is that you are here on time.

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Helen, I would like for this to work out. I really appreciate having you here, but I can't have this situation continue where you're coming in late. So I'm wondering if we can brainstorm together what might be possible options for you, in terms of how to deal with this.

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I'd like us to set up some kind of contract, where you check in with me about the things you'll do to ensure you are here on time. This doesn't mean I'm checking up on you, but rather that you are checking in with me about how it's going.

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I'm going to see this conversation as a coaching for improvement session. I need to tell you, though, that if you are late again, I'll have to start documenting it in your personnel file and we'll have to come up with a remedial plan.

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### **Self-Reflect:**

- In what ways are the examples of the relational approach better than the traditional approach?
- Which would have good outcomes for the supervisor and the worker?

In the relational approach to supervision, there are four primary communication skills used:

- **Active Listening:** Using skills such as body language, paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions to listen attentively and ensure understanding;
- **Self-Management:** Setting aside emotional reactions and other listening blocks that can get in the way of hearing a worker's perspective;
- **Self-Awareness:** Being conscious of assumptions and biases that lead to prejudging workers and others; and
- **Presenting the Problem:** Using objective language to identify performance problems and hold workers accountable.

By utilizing the relational approach to supervision through these four skills, you will improve the working relationship and retain employees longer.

## **Suggestions for Further Reading:**

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