



FINDINGS RELATED TO THE SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

Mapping Disparities for Black Families Project
INFORMATION SHEET #6 | 2025

BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

The supervisory relationship is essential in shaping front-line workers' experiences in child welfare, impacting job satisfaction, retention, and the quality of services provided to Black families. Studies highlight how positive supervisor-worker relationships reduce turnover, alleviate work-related stress, and enhance workers' ability to fulfill their duties effectively. Supportive supervisors foster professional growth and create a conducive work environment, particularly for those in the early stages of their careers. Beyond daily oversight, they address systemic challenges, advocate for workers' well-being, and play a critical role in combating workplace racism. By implementing anti-bias practices, fostering inclusion, and involving workers of color into leadership roles, supervisors contribute to more equitable and supportive workplaces. Overall, the supervisory relationship can be a key factor for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion within child welfare agencies.

WHAT WE DID

We explored how participants experienced the impact of the supervisory relationship in practice and decision-making with and for Black families involved in the child welfare system by conducting semi-structured interviews and focus groups with 79 participants. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was utilized to explore the experiences of participants who work or have worked in child welfare, as well as those who influence policy and practice decisions affecting Black families involved in the child welfare system.



WHAT WE FOUND

Participants in the study had a range of responses when asked about their thoughts on how supervisors, managers, and agency policies impacted their practice and decision-making with Black families. These responses reflect the significance and influence of supervisors and the supervisory relationship in practice and decision-making with Black families, as understood by workers and supervisors. Participants highlighted the power of the supervisory role, the importance of relational skills in managing that power, and the strategies used to navigate supervisory relationships. They also emphasized the critical need for representation and modeling in understanding the needs and challenges for Black families and Black workers. From these responses, we identified three major themes, which are described in greater detail in our full report: *Mapping Disparities for Black Families Project: Findings Related to the Supervisory Relationship*.

Theme 1:
The Power of the Supervisory Relationship

Theme 2:
The Importance of Modeling and Representation: Identities of the Supervisor and the Worker

Theme 3:
Managing up and Creating Change: Navigating Supervisory Relationships



RECOMMENDATIONS



Centre the relational aspect of the supervisory relationship.



Address barriers to communication and collaboration.



Slow down and collaborate.



Develop and implement training that responds to the needs of workers and families.



Demonstrate that representation matters.



Make an organizational commitment to improving supervision practices.

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