



# ND-Friendly Supervision Groups

*A nervous-system–informed model for reflective practice,  
safety, and sustainability*

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## **Important note**

This resource is intended to support understanding and good practice in neuro-inclusive workplace design. It provides general guidance and does not constitute legal, medical, or clinical advice. Organisations should apply the principles in line with their own policies, regulatory obligations, and professional judgement.

Traditional supervision models often assume:

- linear verbal processing
- comfort with live reflection
- stable attention and energy
- fast emotional access
- implicit power safety

For many neurodivergent practitioners, these assumptions quietly **undermine learning, safety, and retention...** even when supervision is well-intentioned.

ND-friendly supervision groups are not “lighter” or less rigorous. They are **better aligned with how neurodivergent nervous systems process, reflect, and integrate.**

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## Purpose of ND-friendly supervision groups

These groups are designed to:

- support clinical quality **without performance pressure**
- reduce practitioner burnout and shutdown
- increase reflective depth over time
- normalise regulation needs in practitioners
- protect against masking-driven competence displays
- improve ethical decision-making under stress

They prioritise **capacity and sustainability**, not speed.

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## Core design principles (non-negotiable)

### 1. Psychological safety before clinical insight

If practitioners do not feel safe, they will:

- mask
- over-prepare
- intellectualise
- avoid uncertainty

ND-friendly supervision treats safety as **infrastructure**, not atmosphere.

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### 2. Regulation-first structure

Reflection is **state-dependent**.

Groups are designed so that:

- regulation precedes exploration
- activation is noticed early
- slowing down is normalised
- silence is permitted

Supervision does not require constant verbal output.

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### 3. Explicit structure reduces cognitive load

Implicit group norms increase demand.

ND-friendly groups use:

- clear agendas
- visible time containers
- predictable formats
- stated expectations

This increases participation, not rigidity.

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### 4. Permission over pressure

Supervision should **expand capacity**, not test resilience.

Participants must be explicitly permitted to:

- pass
  - reflect later
  - contribute non-verbally
  - ask for pacing changes
  - name overload
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## Recommended group structure

### Group size

- **4–6 practitioners** (ideal)
- Smaller groups reduce sensory, relational, and performance load

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## Session length

- **75–90 minutes**
- Shorter sessions often increase urgency
- Longer sessions risk fatigue and shutdown

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## Frequency

- Fortnightly or monthly
- Consistency matters more than intensity

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## Suggested session flow (ND-informed)

### 1. Arrival & orientation (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: settle nervous systems and align expectations.

- Brief check-in (optional verbal)
- Orientation to time and structure
- Explicit permission to step back or pass

No case material yet.

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### 2. Regulation buffer (2–5 minutes)

A short pause before content:

- grounding
- silence
- sensory settling
- breath or movement (optional)

This protects depth later.

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### 3. Case or theme exploration (45–55 minutes)

Key features:

- one focus at a time

- presenter sets boundaries (what they want / don't want)
- supervisor tracks **activation, not just content**
- reflective pacing is actively managed

ND-friendly adjustments include:

- written summaries instead of verbal storytelling
- pauses before responses
- permission to respond after thinking time
- facilitator interruption to slow escalation

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#### 4. Integration & meaning-making (10–15 minutes)

Focus on:

- what shifted
- what was noticed somatically
- what feels unfinished (without resolving it)

Avoid:

- rapid advice-giving
- intellectual pile-ons
- “fixing” the presenter

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#### 5. Closing & discharge (5 minutes)

- Clear ending
- Naming next steps (if any)
- Explicit re-orientation to post-session context

This reduces post-supervision crash.

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### Supervisor stance (critical)

In ND-friendly supervision, the supervisor is:

- a **regulation anchor**, not an evaluator
- responsible for pacing, containment, and safety
- actively monitoring overwhelm signals
- willing to interrupt dynamics that escalate

Supervisors should model:

- uncertainty
- slowing down
- boundary-setting
- self-regulation

Authority is expressed through **containment**, not expertise display.

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## Common ND stressors in supervision (and how to design around them)

Stressor	Design response
Performance anxiety	Explicit non-evaluative framing
Verbal overload	Written / visual options
Processing delay	Built-in pauses
Masking	Normalise partial sharing
Sensory overload	Low-stimulus environment
Shame spirals	Supervisor-led reframing
Post-session crash	Gentle closing + discharge

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## What ND-friendly supervision avoids

These groups intentionally avoid:

- cold-calling
- competitive insight
- forced emotional exposure
- public “challenge” styles
- unstructured cross-talk
- supervisor silence during escalation

These approaches disproportionately harm ND practitioners.

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## Indicators of effective ND-friendly supervision

Over time, you should see:

- reduced burnout and dropout
- increased honesty about capacity
- earlier naming of ethical concerns
- improved reflective depth
- less over-preparation

- more sustainable caseload management

The goal is **longevity**, not intensity.

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## Ethical considerations

ND-friendly supervision:

- does not replace individual supervision where required
- should not blur into therapy
- must maintain professional standards
- should be opt-in, not compulsory

Clear boundaries protect everyone.

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## Summary for training providers & clinical leads

ND-friendly supervision groups:

- improve practitioner retention
- reduce hidden distress
- increase reflective quality
- support ethical practice under pressure

They are not a concession.

They are a **modern, evidence-aligned response** to the reality of neurodivergent practitioners working in high-load systems.