



ANTI-RACIST SUPERVISION BENEFITS ALL by Shabnam Ahmed & Wayne Reid

ORIGINATORS

The [Black and Ethnic Minority Professionals Symposium \(BPS\)](#) (founded by [Wayne Reid](#) at the [British Association of Social Workers \(BASW\)](#)) is a safe online space for Black & Ethnic Minority social workers to educate, empower and equip themselves to navigate the various institutional and structural obstacles they face as professionals. The BPS is a necessary opportunity to role-model Black and ethnic minority excellence, professionalism and unity.

In 2022, [Shabnam Ahmed MBE \(School of Shabs\)](#) and the BPS created the [Anti-racism supervision template](#) and supplementary [guidance](#). A primary objective was to improve access to anti-racist supervision and to enable supervisees to take more control of their supervision. Anti-racist supervision is a distinct evolutionary step forward from simply being 'non-racist'.

Shabnam is a registered social worker, Lead for Adult Safeguarding at Camden Council, Practice Educator and proud member of the BPS. She is deeply committed to keeping anti-racism alive in practice, particularly in supervision spaces. Shabnam believes that intentional anti-racist supervision can significantly benefit social workers at all stages of their career from Black and Global Majority backgrounds who often face racism, career barriers and [disproportionate referrals to fitness panels](#). Shabnam advocates that anti-racist supervision not only promotes the well-being of practitioners but also enhances anti-racist practice and outcomes.

Shabnam initiated "The School of Shabs" in 2020, initially as a YouTube channel, which has now evolved into a successful training company offering tailored sessions on anti-racism, supervision and other topics integral to social work. Also, she was inspired to produce the supervision template in wake of the murder of George Floyd by a US police officer in the same year.

As well as members of the BPS, Shabnam consulted with hundreds of social workers and spearheaded the creation of the supervision template which integrates anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles. She identified common challenges, including: the neglect of supervision; the excessive focus on case management over well-being; the minimal discourse on racism and the factors affecting career progression. This reinforced Shabnam's personal beliefs which are commonly shared by academics and reputable practitioners in the field - that if racism is systematically entrenched in society how can the supervision space be immune to this? By this, Shabnam acknowledges that very few people intend to be racist, but that we should all recognise we have the potential to be.

VERSATILITY IS KEY

It is intended for the Anti-racism supervision template to be versatile enough to suit different areas of practice, career stage and workplace settings. The template aligns with [Toni Morrison's 4x4x4 model](#), infusing each function with an anti-racist perspective. Inspired by academics like Liz Beddoe, Claudia Bernard, and Prospera Tadam, Shabnam proposes integrating Morrison's model with [Tadam's Mandela Model](#) to embed anti-racism principles effectively. For instance, within the development function, highlighted in Morrisons model, supervisors and supervisees should "make time" to acknowledge needs (two elements of the Mandela Model) to talk about career aspirations and progression barriers faced by Black and ethnic minoritised social workers, aiming for transparency and recognition of achievements alongside development needs.

Shabnam states: “We believe that good social work supervision nourishes social workers and is fundamental to our wellbeing and practice. However, if supervision is not reflective of anti-racist, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive principles, then it can do more harm than good - and this has the potential to reproduce inequalities. I encourage all supervisors to reflect on the supervision they undertake and start by asking themselves ‘Do I provide supervision that incorporates the principles of anti-racism?’”

Anti-racist supervision encourages practitioners to think critically about assumptions, biases and organisational constraints which may influence their reflections and work with people from Black, Asian and Global Majority backgrounds.

Shabnam adds: “The resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement in recent years has broken the silence on racism. The wide-ranging impact of structural and institutional racism on Black and ethnic minority social workers’ wellbeing, morale and progression has become clearer than ever before. People can no longer pretend the data does not exist. This fuelled my professional curiosity about supervision spaces and helped me to recognise that supervision is not immune to the white supremacy ideology that is embedded in society.”

[Wayne](#) (BASW England Professional Officer, registered Social Worker and former [Anti-Racism Visionary](#)) said: “Being the founder of the BPS is a definite highlight of my career so far. I was determined to establish a group that was more than just a “talking shop”, so I’m delighted with this amazing initiative from Shabnam and the BPS. It firmly aligns with our shared vision to ‘evaluate existing frameworks and systems within social work to improve the impact they have on Black and ethnic minority social workers and to educate, empower and equip the workforce in accordance with our aims and objectives. The Anti-racism supervision template exemplifies the words of Cornel West: “...creating new possibilities based on visions that become contagious... always against the odds”.”

Here are weblinks to presentation [slides](#) and a [recording](#) of a presentation Shabnam and Wayne delivered to the Principal Social Workers network via Research in Practice. Also, here is a weblink to an accompanying promotional [video](#).

IMPLEMENTATION & FEEDBACK

Shabnam and Wayne are delighted that early feedback suggests that the Anti-racism supervision template has been adopted and adapted for use by wide-ranging social work practitioners, students, managers and Practice Educators across England and beyond. Endorsed by [BASW England](#), it is utilised by countless local authorities and social work employers nationwide. Endorsements from academia, professionals, and educational psychologists underline its effectiveness in promoting meaningful supervisory dialogues. Testimonials highlight its transformative impact, which enhances supervision and promotes collaborative learning. Emphasising inclusivity, the template considers all forms of discrimination and oppression; aligns with social justice principles; promotes equity and is compliant with the [BASW Code of Ethics](#).

Shabnam has presented the template at several conferences, most recently at the [Anti-racism and Health conference in Brighton with Rachael Rooke \(BPS member\)](#). An educational psychologist recently shared that they are now utilising an adapted version of the template in their work. Some other quotes and feedback are below:

“Using the supervision template really helped me to think about identity and encouraged me to be curious about the wholeness of the person in front of me. To be able to explore, understand, make sense of what it is like be them, doing this role, living in the world, their stories and biographies and all the ways those things intersect. It also encouraged me to turn that inward to myself too, to be reflexive and to bring that to the supervisory experience”. **Becca Dove, Head of Family Support and Complex Families**

“We adapted Shabnam Ahmed’s anti-racist supervision template to send as a suggested tool for all Practice Educators to use with our students on placement. After seeing the template, I knew this would encourage an honest, collaborative, and kind conversation between educators and any student, therefore I was always confident that sharing this resource would ensure that educators working with Global Majority students would be equipped to provide meaningful and unbiased supervision”. **Rachael Rooke, Senior Lecturer, Manchester Metropolitan university**

The template has become central to the supervision of a Think Ahead student, who described the experience as transforming and empowering, helping them to amplify their voice and highlight their supervision needs. The student added: *“the template captures what the person is going through, allowing for an understanding of them as a person, bringing the human element of being and it has changed the nature of the supervision to one of learning from each other and articulating feelings”*.

EVALUATION & REVIEW

The Anti-racism supervision template serves as a catalyst for generating authentic, reflective and reciprocal dialogue between supervisor and supervisee. Its uptake and positive reception underline its relevance and efficacy.

The template is not just for exclusive use by staff from Black and Global Majority backgrounds. It is for **ALL** social workers and is not disadvantageous to anyone. Alongside anti-racism, it encourages users to consider all forms of oppression and for these to be discussed where appropriate/necessary as part of supervision. The template is underpinned by a commitment to the Equality Act 2010 and has strong parallels with the values echoed across allied professions, such as nursing, counselling, occupational therapy and others.

Shabnam, Wayne and the BPS plan to evaluate and review the template in future, so do look out for opportunities to influence and shape the next version. Many thanks to BASW England and all of you for your support!

Let’s not forget, “when you’re accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression”.

‘One world, one race... the human race!’

