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Developing decision-making expertise in trainee sport and exercise psychologists: Supervisor perspectives

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Decision-making is an important skill for sport and exercise psychology practitioners, because decisions made by the practitioner hold an influential role in the selection, design, and implementation of successful interventions. Supervisors have been considered an influence on the development of practitioner decision-making, however, little is known about how decision-making expertise is developed during training. Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine how UK sport and exercise psychology supervisors developed decision-making expertise in trainee sport and exercise psychologists (TSEPs) during their 2-year training qualification. After receiving university ethical approval, 6 UK sport and exercise psychology supervisors (male, n = 6) participated in semi-structured interviews. Participants were enrolled on the Register of Applied Psychology Practice Supervisors (RAPPS) and currently supervising TSEPs on the British Psychological Society Qualification in Sport and Exercise Psychology (QSEP; Stage 2). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and a reflexive thematic analysis applied based on a decision-making framework. Supervisors encouraged self-discovery in TSEPs, which developed analytical reasoning. Person-centred approaches were accommodating to the development of analytical reasoning. For example, allowing TSEPs to discover their own solutions to client difficulties through a supportive, empowering supervisory relationship. Essentially, participants were helping TSEPs to develop a cognitive representation of how the selected approach may be applied in their own client consultations. The development of analytical reasoning prepared TSEPs to make decisions at both the programme and intervention level of practice where they explored different options that could be applied to client cases. This model of supervision that mirrors a person-centred model of therapy could also prepare TSEPs for making decisions in an ill-structured and dynamic environment (e.g., at a session level) that is typical of applied sport psychology practice.