

PATHWAYS ABILITIES SOCIETY

PROCEDURE: SEXUALITY

Applies to: All Personnel, Volunteers, Persons Served, Families, Advocates and Caregivers

Effective/Revision Date:

April 28, 2003

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In order to provide clear expectations, the areas of sexuality have been broken down into specific topics. Staff is provided with the topic area and directives on what they must and must not do.

1. **PERSONAL APPEARANCE:** Everyone needs to know that their personal care can be dealt with by themselves or by others effectively, privately and with dignity. Personal appearance includes clothing style, hairstyle, use of perfume and jewelry.

Things staff must do:

- Teach individuals to be as independent as possible when dealing with their own personal care.
- Provide only the support and assistance that is required.
- Ensure individuals purchase their own personal toiletries, including make-up, razors, hairspray, brushes, etc.
- Consider the individual's wishes regarding the sex/gender of the caregiver when dealing with personal hygiene.
- Support and encourage people to wear appropriate clothing for the current weather, or their task for that day. Ensuring that articles of clothing are age appropriate and maintain that individual's dignity.
- Always ensure that when helping someone clean or wash it is done privately.
- Always ensure personal hygiene is discussed privately.
- Always ensure that they are telling the individual step-by-step what they are doing while providing personal care support.

Things staff must not do:

- Use equipment or aids that may be considered old fashioned or uncomfortable.
- Discuss people's personal hygiene in public, inappropriately or in a belittling manner.

2. **FRIENDSHIPS:** People, regardless of their ability or disability, need friendship. Friendships provide us with companionship, comfort, self-esteem, affection and love. Some people need help making and maintaining friendships, in communicating their feelings and needs and to create opportunities for friendship to occur and develop. When people move, consideration must be given to the effect this can have on friendships.

Our judgment on the merits of a friendship can seriously impair its development.

Things staff must do:

Help develop and support friendships by:

- Encouraging and assisting individuals to invite and visit friends.
- Providing space and privacy for people to entertain their friends.
- Helping people to communicate with their friends, i.e. by writing letters, sending cards or emails or using the telephone.
- Teaching people interpersonal skills.
- Encouraging people to possess symbols of friendships such as pictures.
- Helping people access friends of all levels of abilities by attending church, joining clubs and societies, using local shops and attending community activities.
- Encouraging and assisting individuals to acknowledge friends' birthdays, holidays, etc.

Things staff must not do:

- Disregard friendships when people move, or in general.
- Introduce people as a member of a group rather than an individual.
- Presume people do not need friendships.
- Restrict people from developing healthy friendships.

3. RELATIONSHIPS: People go through a number of stages in developing an intimate relationship.

Things staff must do:

- Assist people to identify friends who might share similar interests.
- Assist people to be aware of their appearance and its importance in developing relationships.
- Provide people with many opportunities to teach and learn skills in appropriate settings and engaging in activities with others (dancing, going to a restaurant, pub, bowling, sports, etc.).
- Explain the importance of distinguishing between acceptable intimate behaviors in public and private places.
- Teach people skills such as inviting someone out, sending cards, telephoning, etc.
- Be sensitive to problems people might have with their relationships and support them through these difficulties. Provide them with the skills and tools to manage.

Things staff must not do:

- Do not force people to go out on dates.
- Do not assume an argument between a couple signals the end of the relationship.
- Do not discourage people from going out on a date.
- Do not shame or belittle a person's choice in who they date, regardless of gender or sex.

4. PHYSICAL CONTACT: Physical contact takes a variety of forms ranging from shaking hands, to kissing, to more intimate caressing. Physical contact is a form of communication; an expression of friendship, affection and sexual interest. The social rules regarding physical contact are complex and vary according to culture, age, sex and gender.

Things staff must do:

- Teach people how to greet and say farewell appropriately.
- Use physical contact appropriate to a person's age, sex and the nature of one's relationship to that person.
- When people use physical contact inappropriately, show the person how to touch in a conventional way.

Things staff must not do:

- Assume all people like close physical contact.

INAPPROPRIATE PHYSICAL CONTACT: Inappropriate physical contact refers to touching another person (staff or person served) in an inappropriate manner. Inappropriate touching can occur on any part of a person's body and can be intentional or unintentional.

Things staff must do:

- Verbally and respectfully, make it clear to the person that their actions were not acceptable.
- Reinforce the concept of personal space. Nobody is allowed in anyone's "space" circle unless they have been invited.
- Explain the consequences if they continue to touch inappropriately.
- Hold the person accountable for their actions.
- Notify their immediate supervisor immediately.

Things staff must not do:

- Punish or yell at the person for their actions.
- Accept or "brush off" inappropriate touching.

5. SEX EDUCATION AND THERAPY: All people should be given the opportunity to receive sex education. Sex education takes a variety of forms; it can be directed at individuals or groups and aimed at providing knowledge and/or specific skills.

Sex therapy usually refers to techniques for overcoming difficulties in normal sexual functioning such as sexual dysfunction or disorders, trauma related to sex, and sexual feelings or intimacy.

A typical sex education program would contain the following components: communication skills, relationships, intercourse, reproduction, contraception and birth control, dating, sexually transmitted diseases, anatomy, countering sexual coercion, sexual vocabulary and developing a sexual relationship.

Things staff must do:

- Extend their skills and knowledge in these areas by seeking help from available sources (literature, colleagues with expertise in the field, attending courses, consulting specialist organizations, Health Education departments, etc.).
- Use of appropriate language.

Things staff must not do:

- Assume that because someone has a severe learning difficulty, that they do not require sex education.
- Use pornographic material for educational purposes.
- Consider sex education only when sexual problems occur.
- Initiate sex education programs without training or supervision from a specialist.

6. BIRTH CONTROL: People with diverse-abilities must be given opportunities to obtain advice regarding contraceptive methods. People must be part of and present in the decision-making process. They must decide whether or not they will use contraceptive methods and which method they prefer. Their decision must be made based upon sound advice and information that they can readily obtain and understand.

Things staff must do:

- Provide people with opportunities to obtain advice regarding birth control methods, in particular people likely to be involved in intimate relationships.
- Be aware of people's ethical and/or religious convictions and how these apply to the use of birth control.
- Ensure that, like any other treatment, contraceptive methods used by people are reviewed at regular intervals.
- Be realistic in their response to individual's questions or parenting and marriage. Staff should encourage professional consultation.

Things staff must not do:

- Assume once people are in a relationship or married they need advice regarding contraception.
- Impose their values regarding contraceptives.

7. INTERCOURSE: Sexual intercourse is a normal intimate behavior between two consenting adults and can occur between individuals of any gender.

Things staff must do:

- Ensure couples that may be having intercourse, have the opportunity to receive relevant information on subjects such as birth control, privacy, emotional commitment, mutual consent, etc.
- Discuss with couples (if required) involved in an intimate relationship, appropriate places for intercourse, such as a bedroom and teach them to distinguish between what is acceptable in private and what is unacceptable in public.
- Be sensitive of relationships involving a person having intercourse without that person's consent and/or against their will. Notify a supervisor immediately.

Things staff must not do:

- Assume that people with diverse-abilities should not be given opportunities for safe and healthy intercourse, whether single or in a relationship.
- Stop or prevent a relationship because a couple is having intercourse.
- Impose their values regarding intercourse.

8. MASTURBATION: Masturbation is a normal human sexual behavior. Masturbation is a private behavior that must not take place in public. Some people have difficulties with

masturbation including skin irritations, tension arising from inability to climax and limitations caused by physical disabilities.

Things staff must do:

- Seek professional advice if someone is having difficulties when masturbating.
- Show people where they can masturbate (privacy of their own bedroom).

Things staff must not do:

- Impose their values regarding masturbation.
- Provide misinformation on masturbation.
- Scorn, ridicule or appear shocked when people masturbate.
- Punish people for masturbating in public.
- Prevent people from masturbating by using restrictive clothing (all-in-one suits) or mechanical devices (tray) without consultation.

9. SEXUAL EXPLOITATION: People with a developmental disability are vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Examples include an individual being enticed to carry out “sexual favors” or a caregiver engaging in unnecessary and inappropriate physical contact during care routines. Staff will be made aware of possible exploitation by their own observations, accounts from others or a general suspicion. Individuals receiving services, relatives or staff may allege exploitation.

THINGS STAFF MUST DO:

- Inform the supervisor or executive director of suspicions of exploitation **IMMEDIATELY**.
- Ensure the supervisor or executive director investigates all suspicions of sexual exploitation.
- Teach staff and home members the skills necessary to protect themselves from exploitation.
- Be aware of compromising situations.

Things staff must not do:

- Gossip about alleged exploitation.
- Not alert appropriate persons because of fear of reprisal.

10. SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs): The following is a list of well-known STD infections. Generally speaking, these can occur among individuals of any gender or sexual identity and can result from having unprotected sexual intercourse. Common symptoms include genital sores or soreness, colored discharge (white) from genital openings and/or discomfort while urinating.

STD's: gonorrhea (the clap), syphilis (the pox), genital herpes, genital warts, thrush, trichomoniasis (trick or TV), Hepatitis B, HIV (may develop into AIDs), HPV (human papillomavirus), non-specific infections (often caused by a germ called chlamydia) i.e. cystitis, urethritis, vaginitis, and infestations such as pubic lice (crabs).

These infections have commonly been associated with feelings of embarrassment, shame and immorality. As professionals, we strive towards a more helpful approach, including education/prevention, confidential treatment and support.

Things staff must do:

- Be aware of the symptoms of genito-urinary infections.
- Be emotionally supportive towards the person with an infection.
- Even if only suspicious of an infection, contact the supervisor.
- Get advice from the clinic or doctor.
- Ensure the person's sexual partner, if applicable, is traced and the appropriate person is contacted.
- Ensure that sexual partners receive counseling.
- Educate individuals on prevention of STDs and the importance of safe sexual practices

Things staff must not do:

- Frighten people by telling them "sexual intercourse gives you diseases" or any other type of misinformation.
- Wait for a few days to see if a genital infection disappears.
- Gossip or tell people unnecessarily about a person's infection.

11. PORNOGRAPHY: Pornography refers to magazines, posters and films/videos, which are openly available to all adults. The sexual explicitness of pornography is deliberately designed to provoke sexual arousal in the observer. Pornography may cause people to feel embarrassed and/or disgusted.

In contrast, where the above combination of features; in which people are unclothed, and arousal motives are minimized in drawings/photographs/files; these materials are then classified as either "art" or "educational".

Things staff must do:

- Allow adults to possess pornography, but explain appropriateness of where this should be viewed.
- Ensure pornography is only used and kept in a private place (bedroom).
- Use only "approved" photographic educational material for sexual education purposes.

Things staff must not do:

- Criticize people for possessing pornography.
- Insist that adults obtain or are exposed to pornography.
- Use pornographic magazines and films as a way of giving sex education to an adult.
- Purchase pornographic materials for clients without consulting with your supervisor.