

**SUPERVISORY GUIDE**  
Creating a Trauma-Informed  
and Disability Inclusive Workplace  
**PART 4: SUPPORTING STAFF  
WITH BOUNDARIES AND SAFETY**

Created by MASS Collaboration:  
Movement for Access, Safety, and Survivors



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To request this manual in alternate formats, contact [disability@barcc.org](mailto:disability@barcc.org).

## About the MASS Collaboration (Movement for Access, Safety and Survivors)

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The MASS Collaboration is a collaboration between:

- Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
- Boston Center for Independent Living (BCIL)
- Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)
- MBTA Transit Police

The goal of our collaboration is to create lasting systemic change within and between our organizations. Our improvements will help survivors/victims of sexual violence with disabilities in the Boston area receive accessible, safe and empowering responses and services that promote healing and justice, as they define it for themselves.

We are committed to understanding the barriers that survivors/victims with disabilities experience. We are also committed to building on our existing strengths to address gaps and improve our responses and services.

## Vision Statement

The MASS Collaboration envisions Boston as a city in which the culture within and between victim services, criminal justice, transportation, and disability advocacy and service systems promote the healing, empowerment, and safety of people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence. Survivors/victims with disabilities will receive equal, responsive, safe, barrier-free services from compassionate professionals, staff, and volunteers who are knowledgeable about and comfortable with supporting survivors/victims with disabilities.

## Mission Statement

Our mission is to change the culture within and between all collaborating organizations to enhance services to promote healing, empowerment and safety for people with disabilities who have experienced sexual violence.

We will accomplish this by incorporating the voices of survivors/victims with disabilities to:

- Build formal and informal connections between our organizations;
- Increase the knowledge, skills and confidence of professionals, staff, and volunteers;
- Enhance and develop policies and protocols based on best practices and current research about serving survivors/victims with disabilities to increase access to safe, responsive services.

## Intro to this Guidance Document

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Our collaboration has been working since 2011 to make changes in our organizations to improve response and services for survivors with disabilities. As we've explored how to create sustainable change within our organizations, we've identified that supervisors play a critical role in ongoing support of staff who may be working with survivors with disabilities. Additionally, we talked about the importance of inclusion of survivors with disabilities in this work, including as staff at our agencies.

BARCC and BCIL discussed how rape crisis centers and independent living centers can create workplaces that are welcoming to staff who identify as survivors with disabilities and also who work with survivors with disabilities. Some of the major themes raised by BARCC and BCIL in the needs assessment and throughout the course of our work include:

- Support with the emotional impact of work including vicarious trauma
- Staff safety and assistance with navigating boundaries
- Support with problem-solving with client/consumer work
- Inclusion of employees with disabilities in victim-services

We also identified that creating a workplace that is inclusive of survivors with disabilities results in a workplace that is more inclusive of all staff who bring with them different learning, communication, and work styles. This guidance document on Creating a Trauma-Informed and Disability-Inclusive Workplace was written from those discussions.

This document includes 4 manuals:

- Part 1: Hiring
- Part 2: On-boarding
- Part 3: Supervision
- Part 4: Boundaries and Safety

The goal of this guidance document is to provide information for how agencies, and in particular executive leadership, human resources and supervisors can create a disability-inclusive and trauma-informed workplace. It is best used along with in-person, interactive training to allow executive leadership, human resources, and supervisors the opportunity to practice skills and discuss challenges and ideas with each other. In addition, information in this guidance document can be useful for advocates assisting survivors with disabilities with employment issues.

**\*Please note that this document is not meant to provide legal guidance or advice.**

## Part 4: Supporting Staff with Boundaries and Safety

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### Outline

- Navigating Boundaries in Independent Living Work 10
- Application to Specific Situations 16
  - Situation 1: Off-Site Meetings with Consumers 16
  - Situation 2: Sharing personal information as part of peer mentorship model 20
- Boundaries around Staff Personal Care Needs 26
  - Policies 28
  - During On-boarding 29
  - Guidance for Supervisors 30
- Sexual Harassment 34
- Appendix 42
  - TEMPLATE handout for providing guidance related to staff personal care assistance 43

## Learning Objectives

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By the end of using this manual and subsequent training HR staff and supervisors will be able to:

- Help staff navigate boundaries in independent living work, including sharing personal information with consumers and navigating off-site meetings.
- Help staff with navigating staff personal care needs.
- Implement strategies to intervene when witnessing sexual harassment.
- Respond to disclosures of sexual harassment.
- Help create a culture of assisting staff members while respecting boundaries.
- Help staff navigate receiving and providing personal care assistance from/to other staff.



Safety is a fundamental part of a trauma informed workplace. Safety includes both emotional and physical safety. In earlier manuals (**Part 2: Onboarding** and **Part 3: Supervision**) we discussed how organizations can prevent and respond to vicarious trauma. In this manual we will focus on prevention and response to sexual harassment. People who commit sexual violence take advantage of situations where they can get away with their actions. They may begin by pushing boundaries and then escalate in their behaviors. An important part of preventing sexual violence is to create a workplace culture where all people's boundaries are respected and the safety of all individuals (staff, consumers, etc.) is valued. In addition to preventing sexual violence, this creates a workplace culture that feels safe to survivors with trauma histories. In this manual we will discuss the following:

- Navigating boundaries in independent living work
- Balancing support and boundaries when staff have personal care needs
- Leadership responsibilities in addressing sexual harassment

## Navigating Boundaries in Independent Living Work

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In this section we will discuss navigating boundaries within the independent living model for two situations:

- Off-site meetings
- Sharing personal information

We'll start with general principles and then apply them to these specific situations.

## General Principles

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### Talk Proactively about Boundaries

Talk to new staff proactively and seasoned staff regularly. Share any policies and protocols that your agency has about boundaries. Discuss common situations when staff may need to navigate boundaries. The intent is to do a review, not to go over all situations as working with consumers requires flexibility and the ability to approach each situation on a case by case basis. The goal of a proactive conversation is to set a tone that staff can ask for support with supervisors around navigating boundaries or when there are concerns about boundaries being crossed.

**“I’m not sure what to do when a consumer asks me to meet at a coffee shop or if I have a boyfriend.”**

**–Advocate**

## Listen to Concerns when they Arise

Tip: Remember your active listening skills.

### (Part 3: Supervision, active listening)

When you actively listen to the concerns of staff, you create a supervisory relationship where staff will be more likely to disclose concerns and seek your assistance. Take into account that any employee could potentially have a history of trauma which may impact their reactions. It is not important for you to know if this is the case; this should be a consideration for all employees.

Sample Language:

- “Thank you for letting me know your concern. That can certainly be hard to share. What can I do to help support you?”
- “I hear your concern. Let’s talk about how to handle this situation. What would help you feel more comfortable or safer?”

# NAVIGATING BOUNDARIES IN INDEPENDENT LIVING

## TALK PROACTIVELY ABOUT BOUNDARIES

- What are the situations when you might need to navigate boundaries?
- Think about: How does the situation fit into the consumer’s goals?
- Think about: How do you feel about the situation?



## LISTEN TO CONCERNS

- When staff bring up situations, talk about them.
- Use your active listening skills to show you are listening.



## COME UP WITH SOLUTIONS TOGETHER

- Come up with ideas about options
- Talk about pros and cons of options
- Role play



## SAFETY PLAN

- Ask: Do you feel safe?
- Ask: What would help you feel safer?
- Come up with ideas to help staff with safety.



Created by Gregor Cresnar from Noun Project.

Safety by Gregor Cresnar from the Noun Project

## Come up with Solutions Together

When staff seek support (or you identify a need to support staff) with safety or boundary issues, work together to help staff think about how they want to approach the situation.

- Free think options. Think about what you learned about supervisory styles to determine how to approach the conversation. While this should always be a dialogue, for new staff it may be helpful to provide more concrete guidance based on your experience as a supervisor. For example, “These have been some things that have worked for me in this situation. What do you think about these ideas? What other ideas do you have?” For more experienced staff, asking staff for their ideas and having a discussion to come up with a plan together may be the best approach. Remember your reflective listening skills.
- Walk through the pros and cons of available options.
- Support staff with practicing how to handle the situation. Some ideas for doing this include having staff talk through what they will do or doing role plays. One suggestion would be to practice the role play with the staff being the consumer and the supervisor being the staff person first and then reverse the roles. This gives staff an opportunity to see one option for communicating before practicing how they would want to communicate.

## Safety Planning with Staff

Staff safety issues can come up in our organizations in a number of ways. For example, staff may say that they feel unsafe with a particular consumer or feel uncomfortable with a certain situation. When applicable, assess for safety and discuss a safety plan with staff.

For example, some questions you could ask or adapt for a situation where staff express discomfort or concerns about their safety with a consumer are:

- Do you feel safe (or not) in this situation? What makes you feel this is a safe (or unsafe) situation for you?
- What could we do to make this feel even safer? Offer options.
- What concerns do you have with trying these additional safety measures?

If after the assessment you and staff may determine it would not be safe for staff to work with the consumer, work with your agency to determine how to handle the situation, so that staff are not in unsafe situations and so other staff are aware and supported in providing services if required.

If after the assessment you and staff determine it would most likely be safe for staff to work with the consumer, but that safety planning would still be beneficial, talk about what would help staff feel safer and make a plan. Ideas include:

- Let staff know they can call you or the office if they feel uncomfortable or unsafe in the situation. Let staff know that in an emergency they are encouraged to call 911.
- Offer to call the staff person to check in after a period of time out of the office.
- Offer a debrief call with the staff person after the meeting.

What are some situations where your supervisee may need to navigate boundaries with consumers? What can you share proactively to help your supervisee prepare to handle these situations if they come up?

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## Application to Specific Situations

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### Situation 1:

#### Off-Site Meetings with Consumers

There may be times/situations in which staff will meet consumers off-site. For example, a consumer may be unable to travel or come into the office because of disability or other reasons. Sometimes meeting off-site is needed to accomplish specific goals that a consumer has. Staff safety should always be a primary consideration when assessing whether or not an off-site meeting will be appropriate.

#### Proactive Communication

Some staff at BCIL meet with consumers off-site regularly – for example those who provide home visits. Other staff may occasionally meet with consumers off-site, such as at a coffee shop. For staff whom this situation may come up in their work, it would be helpful to provide some guidance to help staff think about how they might want to navigate such a situation.

A staff person or a consumer may initiate an off-site meeting. Be clear about the set limits that your agency has either in policy or practice about what is not allowed.

For other situations that are up to the discretion of staff you can provide staff with guidance around what to consider when determining whether to initiate or accept a request for an off-site meeting.



## Sample language:

“You might decide that it’s helpful to meet off-site or a consumer may ask if it’s ok to meet off-site. Here are some things you can think about when making that decision. If a specific situation comes up and you need help, we can talk about it.”

1. How does meeting off-site fit into the consumer’s goals? This could be directly related to the specific goals – for example, if a staff person is supporting someone with daily communication, they may go to a coffee shop so that the consumer can practice ordering food. It may also be indirectly related. For example, an off-site location may provide better accessibility. Let staff know if they are not sure whether meeting off-site fits into the consumer’s goal, they can discuss it with you in supervision.
2. How does staff feel about the request to meet off-site? Let staff know that it’s normal to not feel comfortable with all requests for an off-site meeting. It’s ok for staff to feel comfortable meeting with some consumers and not other consumers off-site and also for staff to feel comfortable in certain off-site locations and not others. It’s also ok to feel comfortable meeting with a consumer off-site and then something changes to cause staff to no longer feel comfortable. Let staff know that their comfort level is an important factor and to talk with you if they feel uncomfortable with a request and unsure of how to navigate the situation. It is also helpful to keep in mind that there may be a need to balance comfort level with violating organizational policies related to discriminatory practices when making these decisions. If this comes up, it may be beneficial to talk this over with your supervisor to discuss how to meet consumers/clients’ needs as well as your supervisee’s.

Discuss with staff some language for what to tell the consumer if they receive a request and want to talk it through with you first.

## When a situation arises

1. If staff come to you sharing that a consumer requests an off-site visit, assess:
  - o If there are any safety concerns that you as supervisor identify as a need to explore with staff.
  - o Whether this request fits into the consumer's goals
  - o How the staff feels about the request.
  - o Logistical concerns – for example time availability of the staff to see other consumers.
2. If staff doesn't feel comfortable some things you can do are to:
  - o Validate staff discomfort or concerns.
  - o Find out if there are specific safety concerns for you to address. If the situation is unsafe, do not have staff meet with the consumer off-site.
  - o Find out if there is anything that would help staff feel more comfortable. "Is there anything I can do to support you?"
  - o Free think options. For example, is there an option for meeting at the office and meeting the same goals as an off-site meeting? Is there a different off-site location that would feel more comfortable to staff?
3. If applicable, create a safety or check-in plan with staff.
4. Explore different ways staff can communicate with the consumer. If it helps staff to practice, you can offer to role play.

 *Try it out*

Scenario:

Your supervisee tells you that one of the consumers she has been working with asked her to meet at a coffee shop.

What questions would you ask her?

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What kinds of support can you offer?

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## Situation 2: Sharing personal information as part of peer mentorship model

Peer mentoring takes place between two people with a shared lived experience. Sometimes the shared experience was in the past, or peers may be going through something similar at the same time. Peer mentoring can help a person with self-acceptance, accomplishment of goals, and navigating systems while offering insight and advice. Within the peer mentorship model, it may be appropriate for staff to share some personal information with consumers to help consumers with their independent living goals. Consumers might also ask staff personal questions for various reasons.

### Proactive Communication

Supervisors can use supervision time to discuss how to navigate these dynamics before they come up. Discussing limits and any personal concerns can help your supervisee feel more comfortable setting appropriate productive boundaries when needed. With new employees, a proactive conversation can help them decide what they are comfortable sharing with consumers about themselves personally before they are asked.

Be clear about the set limits that your agency has either in policy or practice about information staff should never share with a consumer/client.

Many decisions will end up being at the discretion and judgement of staff. As a supervisor, you can provide staff with important guidance around what to consider when determining what and how much to share. Sample language: “In your work you might decide it’s helpful to share some personal information about your experience with independent living, or a consumer may ask you personal questions. Here are some things you can think about when making that decision. If a specific situation comes up and you need help, we can talk about it.”

## **Deciding what you would like to share with the consumer**

- 1.** Does this information support the consumer's goals? Let staff know if they are not sure whether sharing something fits into the consumer's goal, they can discuss it with you in supervision.
- 2.** What information are you comfortable sharing? Everyone has their own personal boundaries. Some people are more private than others. Staff should consider what feels comfortable to them to share. For example, some staff may feel comfortable sharing their experience obtaining affordable housing and others may not.
- 3.** Check the consumer's reaction. Consumers also have different personal boundaries. Staff should observe the consumer's reaction and check-in with consumers to ensure that consumers are comfortable with what staff are sharing.

## **Deciding what you want to share if the consumer asks you personal questions**

How does staff feel about the personal question? Let staff know that they don't need to share any personal information that they are not comfortable sharing. Let staff know that it's normal to have different comfort levels with different consumers. Staff may feel comfortable sharing certain information with some consumers but not others. Let staff know that their comfort level is an important factor and to talk with you if they feel uncomfortable with a question and unsure of how to navigate the situation.

For sensitive information, it is important for staff to have the opportunity to think through what it means that other people will have this information or in the longer term. Someone you share information with may share that information with someone else.

- Does this information support the consumer's goals? Let staff know if they are not sure whether sharing something fits into the consumer's goal, they can discuss it with you in supervision.
- Discuss with staff some language for what to tell the consumer if they're uncomfortable with a question that's asked. Staff may respond in many different ways from being direct to figuring out a way to change the subject. Examples include:
  - "Can you help me understand why you want to know that, so that I can get you the information you need?"
  - "Sorry, I don't feel comfortable talking about that personally, but it sounds like you might want some more information about (topic)."
  - "I am glad you feel comfortable to ask me that question, I hope you understand that I am not sure I am comfortable answering it. Can I think about it?"

## When a situation arises

1. Staff may come to you because they are uncomfortable with a question that a consumer asked them or because they're unsure if sharing certain information is appropriate. If staff come to you sharing that a consumer asked a personal question that they are unsure of how to handle assess the reason for the staff's hesitation and validate concerns:
  - o How does the staff person feel about the question?
  - o Why do they think the consumer asked the question?
  - o Listen for inappropriate or unsafe situations. Is the consumer asking inappropriate questions? What is the context? For example, a consumer may ask a question that seems harmless, but in the context of other things the consumer has said or done, may be inappropriate or unsafe.
    - If a consumer is asking inappropriate questions, ask staff how they would like to handle the situation. Would they feel comfortable directly talking to the consumer? If so, support staff with coming up with language or practicing, if that would be helpful to them. Would staff prefer that you speak with the consumer?
    - If inappropriate comments continue or there are concerns with safety, work with your agency to determine how to handle the situation.
  - o If the staff person is comfortable sharing, but uncertain about whether it's appropriate in their role to share, discuss whether this question fits into the consumer's goals. "What would be the benefit of sharing personal information in this circumstance? How does sharing this information this fit into the consumer's goals? Would you feel okay if other consumers or staff ended up having this information"

2. Explore different ways staff can communicate with the consumer.
  - o If staff feel uncomfortable answering a specific question, free think different options. What could staff say instead?
  - o Consider role playing the situation, so staff can practice.
3. Discuss what supports the staff person would like. Possible options include:
  - o Having you in the room or nearby when the staff person is communicating their response to the consumer.
  - o Checking-in and debriefing with staff after their conversation with the consumer.





Scenario:

Staff says that a consumer recently asked, “Do you have the same disability that I have?” Staff is not sure whether they should answer the question.

What questions do you ask staff?

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What kinds of support can you offer to staff?

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## Boundaries around Staff Personal Care Needs

Staff with disabilities may have a range of personal care needs while at work. This can include assistance carrying items, putting on coats, eating/drinking, emptying a urine bag, toileting etc. It is important for agencies that are striving to be inclusive to ensure that the work environment is inclusive to staff who have personal care needs.

Staff come to work with many similar needs (for example, the need for high quality supervision) but they also come with individual needs that require attention such as child and family needs or educational needs. It is within the context of caring for staff as whole people that we explore the need some staff may have for personal care assistance.

In our discussions with different agencies, people who receive personal care at work, and staff who have provided personal care support to other staff at work a range of challenges were raised. These included:

- Challenges around determining who provides certain types of personal care to other staff. Some staff feel comfortable with any task and others feeling comfortable with some tasks, but not all.
- Challenges with power dynamics. For example, a supervisee not feeling comfortable expressing discomfort providing personal care to their supervisor. In addition, we heard from some people with disabilities who felt that having staff provide personal care to them felt disempowering to them in the collegial relationship.
- Challenges with boundaries. This can include issues with time management where staff who are frequently asked for assistance may not have time to complete functions of their job, but don't feel comfortable not providing requested assistance.
- Challenges with safety. This can include harm done because the person assisting does not have the appropriate skills to assist but does so any way. This can also include concerns about the personal care situation being exploited and sexual harassment by either party.

- Lack of basic training for assisting such as making sure to ask the person you're assisting how they would like care provided.

Our collaboration discussed these challenges and came up with the following guidance. We believe that this is a situation that should be handled with flexibility balancing a culture of support with boundaries.

## Policies

- We recommend that agencies require that PCAs provide a substantive part of the care. PCAs should provide intimate care such as toileting and care that requires specific skills. This enhances staff independence, diminishes power imbalances at work, and supports staff safety.
- Agencies will need to decide whether the agency will pay for the PCA time or pay for a part of the PCA time. For agencies who commonly have multiple staff who need PCAs, consider hiring an employee specifically to provide personal care to staff.
- Protocols or guidance should be clear about limits and exceptions your agency has decided to set regarding staff providing personal care to other staff:
  - What are the tasks that your agency requires a PCA to provide except in emergencies? For example, your agency may be comfortable with staff asking other staff to assist with putting on a coat but would require a PCA to assist with toileting except in emergencies.
  - Some relationships carry power dynamics which may prevent someone from feeling comfortable declining. For example, a supervisee may feel uncomfortable saying “no” to a request from a supervisor or a volunteer/intern might feel uncomfortable declining a staff request. Consider these power dynamics when creating policies.
- Develop policies with a focus on client/consumer confidentiality. For example, if a medical advocate needs their PCA to come to the hospital with them, the PCA should not be in the room where the evidence is being collected and should not be provided with information about the case. A place for the PCA to wait should be decided on where confidentiality could be protected and where the advocate can easily access their PCA when needed.

## During On-boarding

When talking about accommodations with staff, HR or other administrators who are orienting staff should also talk about personal care needs. Review the policies and talk about the agency's culture of interdependence

Discuss a personal care plan with people who need personal care assistance:

- How frequently would the employee need their PCA to come to the office?
- If the PCA needs to be in the office on-going instead of coming in at scheduled times, what can the agency provide for space for the PCA?
- If applicable to the job, would the employee be more comfortable doing some work remotely?
- If there are tasks that other staff can help with, discuss guidance about asking for assistance from other staff (see below).

When discussing a culture of interdependence and the possibility that staff might ask other staff for some personal care need, talk about boundaries. There are many reasons why someone may not be comfortable assisting with certain personal care needs. Personal boundaries of employees should be respected and assisting with personal care should not be presented as an obligation. Additionally, it should be made clear that deciding whether or not to assist will not impact employment or performance evaluations.

How would you explain your agency's culture of interdependence?

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How would you introduce the topic of staff personal care to all staff?

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### Guidance for Supervisors

Your role supporting supervisees with navigating personal care needs and boundaries is similar to your role helping staff navigate other individual needs. For example, you might be helping a supervisee navigate coverage with colleagues when they need to balance work with childcare needs. Be clear about any policies and protocols your agency has. Within that support staff individual needs while also balancing the needs of all staff. In regard to personal care you are balancing needs of staff who need personal care assistance with the needs of staff who may be asked to assist with personal care assistance. The following provides guidance you can provide. Let staff know they can come to you to help navigate specific situations. We have also included this information in a tip sheet that you can give to staff to help them remember the information:

**If you are asking for personal care assistance:**

- Be clear about the types of activities when you should ask your PCA for assistance except in emergencies and the types of activities that you can ask other staff for assistance.
- Respect personal boundaries of your colleagues. Ask first and ask each time. Be mindful of individual staff's time, and respect personal boundaries. If staff seem hesitant or declines, don't keep asking.
- Ask for support in supervision or from another colleague about appropriate ways to ask/approach staff with a need for personal assistance.
- Explain how you would like care provided.
- State that the situation is an emergency if that is the case.
- Remember, you can request that the staff person who is assisting you stop at any time. If there are concerns about harassment, follow the agency harassment policy.

What ideas do you have about ways staff can approach other staff with asking for personal care assistance?

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## If you are asked to assist with personal care

- Staff should be open to helping but consider their own personal boundaries. You can think about:
  - What tasks do you feel comfortable assisting with? For example, a survivor may be concerned that they will be triggered by some types of personal care and decide that they do not want to take those risks at work.
  - What tasks are you able to assist with without harming the person. For example, it might not be safe for some staff to assist with tasks that involve lifting another person, even in an emergency.
  - How will helping with this task impact the work relationship that staff has with the other person? For example, is there a power imbalance?
  - In an emergency, is there anyone else who can help? If not, depending on the situation, it will be necessary for staff to help even if uncomfortable. If this happens, it would be important for a supervisor to debrief with staff.
- Help staff think of ideas and role play ways to decline if they're not comfortable assisting someone with a task. Some people may be more comfortable with a direct response than others. Examples of responses could include:
  - "I don't think I'm able to help you with that and I don't want to do the wrong thing. Let me find someone else to help."
  - "I don't feel comfortable doing \_\_\_\_task, but I can help you do \_\_\_\_\_task."
  - "I'm sorry, I'd really like to help, but I have a deadline today. Can we think of another person you can ask today?"
- If at any time you feel uncomfortable providing assistance with a task, you can stop. If there are concerns about harassment, follow the agency harassment policy.
- Provide basic information about how to assist someone else.



- Ask how they would like the personal care task to be done. Not making assumptions about how to assist is a positive step in respecting boundaries and ensures that you're doing things correctly.
  - Ask what they can do by themselves and what they need help with? For example, someone might need help with getting their arms into the coat but can button themselves.
- Ask if it's helpful if you communicate what you're doing before you do it.
- Remember that some people might need tasks done a very specific way to meet their needs and may ask you to re-do something (e.g. putting their cup and straw in a certain position). You can also proactively check-in, "Am I doing this correctly? Do you want me to do this in a different way?"

What are other suggestions you have for staff who may be uncomfortable with a request for personal care assistance?

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## Sexual Harassment

Setting a culture that prevents sexual harassment includes:

- Having clear policies about sexual harassment.
- Developing a work culture where people intervene when they notice boundaries being crossed.
- Providing a supportive response to survivors.

### Policies about sexual harassment

Agencies should have policies about sexual harassment in the workplace that include examples of the range of actions that are considered to be sexual harassment. Policies should include what to do if staff are sexually harassed, including multiple people whom staff can tell.

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, it is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex. Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.

THE EEOC also adds that harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general. Some examples of sexual harassment are:

- Telling lewd jokes, or sharing sexual anecdote or images
- Making sexual comments about appearance, clothing, or body parts
- Inappropriate touching, including pinching, patting, rubbing, or purposefully brushing up against another person
- Asking sexual questions, such as inquiries about someone's sexual history or their sexual orientation

## Ensuring Staff are Aware of Sexual Harassment Policy

Go over your agency sexual harassment policy with new staff verbally and provide a written copy. At your agency it may be the role of Human Resources or supervisors to review the agency sexual harassment policy with new staff. Even if HR has gone over the information, consider reinforcing the information by checking in with your supervisee and asking if they have any questions. Let staff know that their safety is important and that you can be an additional resource to go to if they experience sexual harassment from co-workers and also if they experience any form of sexual violence from consumers. Be clear about what you would need to do if you know about sexual harassment and all internal and external resources available to them.

## Being an Active Bystander

As a leader in your organization you have the opportunity and responsibility to set a tone that sexual harassment is not tolerated by intervening if you witness or learn about sexual harassment.

### How Do I Recognize Sexual Harassment?

As discussed earlier, sexual harassment includes a broad range of behaviors. Some things to consider are the following:

- Who has the power in this situation?
- What is the impact on the person in the situation?
- Is there a pattern of behavior?

Note: It is important to intervene in one-time incidents and not wait to see a pattern. Intervening early prevents the behavior from continuing. If someone is not intending to hurt someone else, getting feedback will help them change their behavior. If someone's intent is to harm someone, intervening sends a message that this behavior is not acceptable.

## Tips If I'm Witnessing an Incident Occur

There are many different ways you can intervene depending on the situation. For some situations, you must report to HR or other senior administrator based on your policies and legal requirements. In other situations, you might use a range of active bystander techniques depending on what you feel most comfortable and safe doing. Some ways include:

- **Direct:** Speak up to interrupt a harmful situation. “Jim, I know you think that is funny but what you are saying violates the sexual harassment policy here, you need to stop”.
- **Distract:** Engage in conversation with the person who is targeted or change the subject in the group – this does not address the root cause of what it is happening, but it does do two things: 1) it de-escalates the situation and draws attention away from the person being harmed. This could give the person being harassed the opportunity to leave the space, 2) shows the person who is doing the harm that others are watching.
- **Delegate:** If you feel that you are not able to address what is happening due to your role, consult

### 4 simple strategies for **BYSTANDER INTERVENTION**

Every year thousands of people are sexually assaulted.

You can make a difference.



#### 1 DIRECT

Speak up and address inappropriate comments and behaviors head on.



#### 2 DISTRACT

Get creative and do something to disrupt the situation.



#### 3 DELEGATE

Alert other people and ask for their assistance. The more people who are aware and able to help the better.

#### 4 DELAY

Take a moment to figure out your best course of action. If you freeze in the moment, you can always follow up later on.



**JUST DO SOMETHING!**

Safer communities start with you.

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with someone who would be able to, like HR or a senior administrator.

- **Delay:** Not everyone is able to employ these strategies when something is happening in the moment, and that's okay. You can follow up with both/either people involved afterwards. When you follow up with the person being harmed, you show that you care and that you want this workplace to be a supportive space for them. When you follow up with the staff person doing the harm, you are showing them that that behavior isn't acceptable. It is also an opportunity to support them in changing their behavior, possibly with lower defenses (rather than calling them out publicly).

After the immediate incident, it is important that supervisors follow agency policy for reporting sexual harassment. Talk to the person who was targeted first to let them know what will happen. Follow information below around "Responding to Disclosure from a Supervisee" for supporting the survivor.

Example:

You overhear two staff members talking about a party that they went to over the weekend. They talk in a staff lunch room about how the party was drug and sex-themed, and a staff member appears uncomfortable.

How could you intervene?

Some examples are:

- Join the group and change the subject. (Distract)
- Tell the employees that the conversation is not appropriate for this space (Direct)
- Talk to the employee that looked uncomfortable at a later time when you can speak privately. (Delay)

What are some tactics you would use?

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## Responding to a Disclosure from a Supervisee

A supervisee may disclose sexual harassment to you first as someone whom they trust. Your response is important. A positive first response helps survivors seek additional supports and is important to their healing process.

First, it is important to validate that staff safety is very important and that you believe them. Survivors respond to sexual violence in many ways, such as numbing, crying, anger -all of which are normal.

Survivors don't always appear to be upset. This does not mean that they were not sexually harassed. In addition, survivors often do not disclose right away, so some time may have passed between the incident and disclosure. Avoid asking "why" questions. You might be attempting to better understand the situation, but "Why?" questions may be interpreted as blaming or skeptical. The answers won't change what's happened. Don't press for details. Allow the survivor to share what they want, when they want.

Example language:

"Thanks for sharing what happened. That must have been difficult. I want you to know that I believe you, and we can figure out together what options they have. You deserve to feel safe at work."

Let your supervisee know what will happen next. While you will need to report sexual harassment to others in your agency, it is best to work with the supervisee to see if you can support the supervisee in reporting to the appropriate people at your agency. Explain your organization's process for investigation, including what information will be shared with them and what information must be confidential.

It is important that after reporting, the agency first take steps to protect the safety of the supervisee. It is best practice to discuss what the supervisee needs in order to feel safe during the investigation. Be sure the supervisee knows that retaliation is not acceptable and what to do if they're concerned.

Provide the supervisee with resources, such as BARCC's hotline or information for requesting BARCC services. Reassure your supervisee that although BARCC and BCIL are working in collaboration, all information, including whether or not the supervisee seeks BARCC services is confidential and will not be shared with BCIL. Don't tell the survivor what to do though. Experiencing violence may make a person feel as if they have lost some agency and control over what happens next, and it is important not to compound this by adding pressure to do things that they do not want to do or are not yet ready to do.

**There is no “right” way to cope with trauma.**

Your supervisee may want to share their feelings during the investigation process during supervision. You may not necessarily agree with your supervisee, but you can support them by validating their feelings and using your active listening skills. Example: “I hear you saying that this process is frustrating.” It may also be helpful to work with the supervisee on balancing supervision time, so that you can both support the supervisee with their concerns while also continuing to support them in their work. For example, “I want to provide you as much support as I can for your harassment case and for the work you are doing with consumers, can we talk about what balance would be most helpful to you with our supervision time”?

What would you say if your supervisee told you they were sexually harassed by another employee?

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## If a Supervisee is Accused of Sexual Harassment

While this can be a very difficult situation to navigate for you as a supervisor, below is some guidance to handle situations in which a supervisee is accused of sexual harassment. The first piece of guidance is to try to remain as unbiased as possible. Your role is to deliver information about the process outlined by your organization about dealing with accusations of sexual harassment. Reinforcing what the process is and how they can get outside support, if appropriate, should be the focus of these interactions. You as a supervisor do not need to go into an investigative mode, nor should you express judgment throughout the process.

Example Language:

“It’s come to my attention that there has been an accusation of sexual harassment. I want to tell you about the steps in the organization’s process.”

How leadership at agencies respond to disclosures of sexual harassment is important. By having a clear, proactive response that is supportive to survivors, you communicate that your workplace takes sexual violence seriously. This provides a supportive environment to survivors and creates a workplace culture that is preventative of future sexual violence.

# APPENDIX

- Template of Staff Personal Care Support Tip Sheet

## TEMPLATE handout for providing guidance related to staff personal care assistance

(Agency) values a culture where staff are open to assisting other staff in order to create an inclusive environment. While supporting this value, (Agency) also recognizes and respects personal boundaries within an accessible, accommodating culture.

(Agency's) policy regarding staff personal care assistance is (insert summary language of agency policy.) E.g. Agency requires Personal Care Attendants to provide all intimate, skilled, and scheduled (e.g. assistance with lunch) personal care. Staff may request that other staff assist with other activities such as assistance with xyz activities and with emergencies. While staff are encouraged to provide assistance, staff are not required to provide personal care assistance.

The following tips are meant to help staff navigate personal care needs.

If you are asking for personal care assistance:

- Respect personal boundaries of your colleagues. Ask first and ask each time. Be mindful of individual staff's time, and respect personal boundaries. If staff seem hesitant or declines, don't keep asking.
- As much as possible, try to find more than one person whom you can ask for assistance. Try to ask different people at different times for assistance.
- Explain how you would like care provided. Ask what would make the person providing assistance comfortable with assisting.
- State that the situation is an emergency if that is the case.
- Remember, you can request that the staff person who is assisting you stop at any time. If there are concerns about harassment, follow the agency harassment policy.

Example language:

- "I need some support putting on my coat. Would you be willing to help me with this occasionally?"
- "It would help me out if you could tell me when you're starting to help me put on the coat, so that I'm ready."

It might help to make a plan:

Who do you want to ask for assistance with personal care?

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How might you ask for assistance with personal care?

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Your supervisor is available if you want to talk through your options.

If you are asked to assist with personal care

- Consider your own personal boundaries when deciding with what activities you're comfortable assisting. You can think about:
  - What tasks do you feel comfortable assisting with? You don't have to assist with any tasks that you are uncomfortable with.
  - What tasks are you able to assist with without harming the person. For example, it might not be safe for some staff to assist with tasks that involve lifting another person.
  - How will helping with this task impact the work relationship that staff has with the other person?
  - In an emergency, is there anyone else who can help? If not, depending on the situation, it might be important to help even if uncomfortable. If this happens, talk to your supervisor about the situation afterwards to get support.
- If you feel uncomfortable providing assistance with a task, you can stop. If there are concerns about harassment, follow the agency harassment policy.
- How to assist:
  - Ask how they would like the personal care task to be done. Not making assumptions about how to assist is a positive step in respecting boundaries and ensures that you're doing things correctly.
    - Ask what they can do by themselves and what they need help with? For example, someone might need help with getting their arms into the coat but can button themselves.
  - Ask if it's helpful if you communicate what you're doing before you do it.
  - Remember that some people might need tasks done a very specific way to meet their needs and may ask you to re-do something (e.g. putting their cup and straw in a certain position). You can also proactively check-in, "Am I doing this correctly? Do you want me to do this in a different way?"

Example language for navigating boundaries:

- o “I don’t think I’m able to help you with that and I don’t want to do the wrong thing. Let me help you find someone else to help.”
- o “I don’t feel comfortable doing \_\_\_\_\_task, but I can help you do \_\_\_\_\_task.”
- o “I’m sorry, I’d really like to help, but I have a deadline today and I’ve already helped you a few times. Can we think of another person you can ask today?”

It might help to make a plan:

If you are uncomfortable with a request, what might you say?

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What could you do to help instead?

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Talk to your supervisor if you want help navigating your boundaries with supporting other staff.