



## **Prevention and Avoidance of Sexual Misconduct**

The best way to maintain the appropriate boundaries in a professional relationship is through the worker's focus on maintaining good, personal psychological health, an awareness of potential problems and good, clear communication. One's power and control over a participant should not be underestimated. One should also remain aware that the participant might experience touch, personal references and sexual matters very differently from the worker due to a variety of factors including gender, cultural or religious background, or personal trauma such as childhood sexual abuse. Risky situations should be avoided and the proper boundaries of any professional relationship should be communicated clearly and early in the service delivery process. The following guidelines suggest approaches to prevent boundary violations and avoid complaints of sexual misconduct.

1. Respect cultural differences and be aware of the sensitivities of individual participants.
2. Do not use gestures, tone of voice, expressions, or any other behaviors, which participants may interpret as seductive, sexually demeaning, or as sexually abusive.
3. Do not make sexualized comments about a participant's body or clothing.
4. Do not make sexualized or sexually demeaning comments to a participant.
5. Do not criticize a participant's sexual preference.
6. Do not ask details of sexual history or sexual likes/dislikes.
7. Do not talk about your own sexual preferences, fantasies, problems, activities or performance.
8. Learn to detect and deflect seductive participants and to control the work environment.
9. Maintain good records that reflect any intimate questions of a sexual nature and document any and all comments or concerns made by a participant relative to alleged sexual abuse, and any other unusual incident that may occur during the course of, or after a home visit.

### ***What Workers Can Do?***

If a worker finds himself or herself having a problem with how he or she is treating or feeling about a participant or how participants are feeling about them, workers should get assistance as soon as possible. If the participant has been sexualizing the relationship, this should be documented, as should actions taken to diffuse the situation. Workers are strongly encouraged to talk to their supervisor and/or executive director about any concerns they have.

### ***What Supervisors Can Do?***

Supervisors need to maintain a regular schedule of individual meetings with each staff person that they are responsible for supervising. Supervisors need to be alert to situations that may pose more risk for the worker. Supervisors need to initiate the conversation and not wait for the worker to approach them with the potential problem. Supervisors need to consult with their agency Human Resources Department and/or their Agency Executive Director for assistance.