

This is part of a copy of the “Code of Conduct” I wrote with and for staff at a residential establishment for people with mental health problems. I had (and have) a long standing relationship with the managers and staff and have a high regard for the work they do and the way they do it. Please feel free to copy and use it. An acknowledgement would be good and if you want a bespoke solution please call me.

Ways To Work Together

Foreword

The purpose of this document is to provide practical guidance to new and existing members of staff about how the ethos of XXXXXX can best be expressed in the way we treat other members of the community. During 2007 we had a number of meetings to discuss what a Code of Conduct for XXXXXX should contain.

The discussions were clear, purposeful, honest and good-natured recognising always that it is impossible to predict or prescribe for every eventuality. This document itself cannot do justice to the quality of the discussions and is of secondary importance after the process of thinking and discussing how we should behave towards each other.

Much of what we do requires “judgement calls” and this is an attempt to help people to develop their decision-making clearly recognising that whatever we do in the XXXXXX setting affects others for good and ill. There are some straightforward rules in this document but it is mostly a guide to help people make decisions about what to do after taking current circumstances into account.

It is often difficult to find the right way forward when we are faced with behaviour and attitudes which we find unacceptable or distasteful especially since our own ideas about what is acceptable are at least partly an expression of our own upbringing, age and culture. The acceptability of some behaviour depends upon context and some residents (and sometimes staff or volunteers) may have particular difficulties in understanding what is appropriate in one setting is not OK in others. e.g. young people wearing clothes that are appropriate on the dance floor but seem to older eyes to be inappropriate in work settings.

There are many existing guidelines and rules set by external authorities including the law of the land and this code does not replace them but is intended to be a practical guide to good practice in our everyday dealings with people.

You have a duty to read and make sure you understand the information in the Policy folder and Staff Handbook.

The basic assumption underpinning this document is the necessity of treating ourselves and others with RESPECT, as the dictionary puts it, “ the state of being regarded with honour or esteem”. A key factor in building and maintaining respectful relationships is the establishment of TRUST (“ firm reliance on the integrity, ability, or character of a person or thing”)

These paragraphs are not written in order of importance- to the person on the receiving end of poor practice the issue they are dealing with at the time IS the most important for them.

Confidentiality- Balancing Privacy and Protection

There are clear rules governing the handling of documents etc.

It is necessary also to show respect by refraining from gossip about residents and other members of staff. Whenever you are speaking about a resident or colleague remember and respect the privacy of the individual. Personal habits and private behaviour need to remain private unless there are health and safety issues which affect others in the community. There is a distinction to be made between passing on information to colleagues where the purpose is to further the interests of the resident or protect the well-being of the community and chit-chat which passes the time or temporarily relieves irritation without doing anything to solve the problem. As the Yiddish proverb says “ Gossip hurts three-he who says it, he who hears it and he who it is about “

- It is important that peoples’ private lives, whether staff or residents, are not the subject of discussion outside the relevant work meetings.
- If someone chooses to confide in you they may need to be reminded that there are limits to confidentiality. The protection of individuals, the XXXXXX community and sometimes the wider society may mean that information has to be passed on to the appropriate person or authority.
- Key workers need to be aware that protection of their key residents’ privacy is their responsibility.
- If the key worker identifies risks to the individual or the community they must take their concerns to the senior person who is most available to them at the time.

Whistleblowing

When it is apparent that a resident or member of staff is behaving, has behaved or states the intention to behave in ways which will harm themselves or others it is not an option to keep this to yourself or gossip about it.

- ex.1: If a staff member is intoxicated by drink or drugs it is the responsibility of all members of staff to report this to the management in the expectation that this will lead to disciplinary action. This is a clear instance where the good of the whole community takes precedence over any misplaced sense of loyalty to the individual.
- ex.2: If a resident states their intention to self-harm or harm others a report must be made to a senior person who can decide on the necessary action.

Giving Feedback-“Catch Them Doing It Right”

If a colleague or resident does or says something you feel positive about it is important you tell them. They will feel supported and encouraged and the general atmosphere is improved. Withholding positive feedback

means that people can feel unnoticed and uncared for and sometimes leads to negative behaviour just to provoke a response

- Be generous with your feedback and avoid making comparisons or qualifications. e.g. Replace “You’re quite good at that now, much better than I am “ with “That’s great! Please show me how you did it”
- It does not help others if you put yourself down.
- Be careful that you neither give nor receive positive feedback that seems to be manipulative. e.g. “ You did that really well – can you work a shift for me on Saturday? “

If you have a grievance with someone or you think they need feedback to encourage them to change, respectful confrontation is a much better alternative than grumbling to colleagues or having an internal conversation with yourself about what you “should have said “.

- Checking out your perception of events with a third party can be helpful ex. “ I think I may have put my foot in it with Bill when I said xxxx. What do you think? “ but great care must be taken that it is to ask for help in solving a problem not to blame the other person or get someone to “take sides”.
- Whilst a brief “moan” may give some relief it is usually more helpful to get on with solving the problem or asking for the help you need.

A clear distinction needs to be made between a person and their behaviour and our responsibility for our feelings and thoughts-so that when we are annoyed by another's behaviour we may challenge them without:

- Name calling “You’re stupid”
- Threatening “ If you do that again I’ll.....”
- Blaming “It’s all your fault we’re in this mess”
- Shaming “You should be ashamed of yourself”
- Avoiding responsibility “You make me feel.....”

A more fruitful and respectful approach is the Action/feeling statement .

Find a time when it is clear the person is not too busy or too distressed to hear you :

- 1st Ask them to spare you some time because you have something to discuss with them
- 2nd Assuming you have a positive response tell them “I was (feeling word) when you (action they did), Or “When you did (action) I felt (feeling) in a clear non-punitive tone.
- 3rd Hear what they have to say and discuss what they (and possibly you) might have done differently

Sometimes you might have a sense that someone is avoiding or ignoring you or is “off” with you in some way. It takes courage to check out with them if you have done something to offend them-but unspoken personal grievances can effect the whole community. Often the person you’re worried about simply had a bad nights’ sleep or is preoccupied with a personal worry-your making contact can help both of you, and you may get some feedback to help you improve your relationships and working practices.

The rest of the document has sections on:

Self care

Supporting Residents

Making and Keeping Agreements

Leaving

Dress Code

Supervision

Looking Outwards

Afterword

XXXXXX has people from different life stages and backgrounds as residents and staff. This document is an attempt to give guidance which is in keeping with the values and aspirations we have in common. There is no question that everything in it is “easier said than done” and we can expect that everyone will make mistakes from time to time. We can learn from honest error as well as success and that learning can be used to review and renew our work. Balancing the setting of sensible boundaries with the need for understanding and compassion is a continuous and demanding process and needs our collective intelligence and energy.

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