

Madawaska Valley

Association For

Community Living

**POLICY: SEXUALITY**

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Policy Statement

Sexuality is a basic biogenic need and is integral to the total way in which an individual relates to his or her world as a male or female. It includes not just sexual activity, but also the acknowledgement of feelings, ways of relating to self and others, self-esteem, gender identification, and sexual orientation. Individuals with ID/DD share the need to love and be loved, and as consenting adults to establish relationships with a person of their choice and to express their sexuality so long as they are not injuring themselves or others. Staff need to be trained to help people they support develop healthy and functional expressions of their sexuality.

To ensure that this happens, Madawaska Valley Association for Community Living will value the voice, and advocate for the rights, of people with ID/DD.

Policy Objectives

1. To increase participants’ awareness and understanding of: their own person and sexuality, appropriate socialization skills, and respect for the sexuality of others, through education and training for all people in service.
2. To put forth a series of broad but detailed statements on a range of topics that further develop procedures that promote consistent and humane service approaches, responsive to the social sexual needs common to all people.

General Procedures Regarding Sexuality

Sexual Expression

MVACL accepts that forms of expression vary and are influenced by personal and environmental factors. The Association will be sensitive to and respect each individual’s sexuality. People with developmental disabilities may be heterosexual, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, monogamous or not monogamous, and have the right to express themselves accordingly.” Staff do not have the right to impose personal values. As long as the sexual act is legal and involves consenting adults, we don’t interfere.

The Association will encourage behaviour and foster attitudes that respect and value the self and others.

Privacy

In general, privacy, discretionary time and a private place to store personal belongings are to be considered essential components of an individual’s sexuality. No one (staff or individual) can enter or disturb another’s private space without being accompanied by the person whose space you are entering or without the consent of that person.

Specifically, it is the policy of the Association to respect and protect the person’s right to engage in sexual activity in an appropriate private environment.

If an individual feels that such an environment does not exist in the accommodation setting, an alternate setting may be sought. Consultation regarding the individual’s options for privacy will be done on an individual counseling basis.

Consent

Adults with developmental disabilities have the right to make their own decisions about relationships. A person with a developmental disability has the right to engage in sexual activity with another person in an appropriate environment providing he/she is capable of providing informed sexual consent. Since it is recognized that individuals of different capabilities will have more or less ability to express consent, it is to be presumed that a person is able to give his/her consent unless:

1. There is evidence to the contrary, or
2. Front-line staff along with the manager or director’s input feels that one or both of the clients lack the social maturity and proper sexual education to make a sound decision in this area.

Staff may be called upon to exercise judgment to determine whether informed consent has been given and intervene in a given situation where it appears consent does not exist.

It is important that the education of each person encourages them to recognize their personal rights enabling them to give definite consent or withhold consent to participate in any sexual encounter. Education should reflect a genuine concern about the question of consent and the ability to assess this.

Intimacy and Relationships

Forming relationships is an important part of being human and of participating effectively in community living. It is recognized that relationships involve increasing degrees of emotion and may include a related progression of sexual activity. The ability to relate to others is a learned skill. Encouragement should be given to foster the development of relationships within or outside of the Association’s services. It is the role of staff to educate with regards to the development of relationships. Intervention may take place if staff (along with the manager and/or director’s input) believes it is warranted.

Most relationships are not sexual, but some are physically affectionate. All people have the right to be physically affectionate with an agreeable party. Physical affection differs from sex. Sex is the touching of the sexual parts (breasts, vagina, penis, and anus) of the body for sexual gratification. Physical affection does not require the ability to provide consent, but rather, just a willing partner.

Liaisons and Unions

MVACL recognizes that relationships may develop into common-law living arrangements as well as marriage. When such circumstances develop, the people involved will be encouraged to attend a marriage counseling course. Private counseling regarding the seriousness of such relationships and the possible serious legal and religious implications will also be encouraged.

When a couple feels supportive or independent living arrangements are important, MVACL will make every effort to assist in finding suitable living arrangements as well as support services, which may be required in the new living arrangements.

The Association does not presently offer shared accommodation through the Accommodation Services Program.

Sexual Behaviour

In addition to the laws, which dictate what are unacceptable sexual practices, there exists a general social community standard of conduct for adults governing a range of social sexual behaviours.\* It is the role of the MVACL to educate people and make them aware of these community/social standards. Adherence to the law regarding sexual behaviour will be expected of everyone, again, as is the standard of the community.

Birth Control

Birth control refers to a range of pregnancy prevention measures exercised by either the male or female involved in sexual intercourse. MVACL encourages responsible parenting; therefore, birth control measures are to be encouraged to limit procreation among those who are sexually active and presumed to be fertile. All birth control methods are to be medically approved and the chosen method appropriate to the health and welfare of the person. The health implications of using birth control devices may make it necessary that an informed staff work in conjunction with the person’s physician, to monitor the practice. The right of the person to be informed about the method and to participate in making the choice is imperative, to the fullest extent possible.

Parenting

Procreation should be the deliberate and chosen outcome of sexual intercourse by two adults who are able to take full responsibility for the parenting of their offspring. Due to possible risks to the newborn child and mother, MVACL commits to encouraging people to seek genetic counseling and to receive extensive counseling that will enable them to have a full understanding of the complexities and difficulties involved.

Where pregnancy has resulted and the decision is made to parent, MVACL advocates that the parent(s) take advantage of further counseling and educational programs. We also advocate supportive and monitoring services to develop parenting skills and promote the best possible situation for both the parent(s) and child.

Sterilization

Sexually active people wanting information about sterilization will be referred to an appropriate medical or sexual counseling resource for factual information. MVACL respects that this decision will be the individual’s choice.

Abortion

The termination of pregnancy is to follow a legal and medically approved course of action. The role of the staff is to assist the woman in determining her probable pregnancy status, direct her to medical and impartial counseling services, as quickly as possible. Staff will not to impose their own beliefs or opinions.

Education

M.V.A.C.L. will provide annual Health and Well-being education to everyone we serve.

Topics included are:

Abuse

Self-esteem and Well Being

Development of relationships Communication

Personal Rights and Responsibilities

Diet and nutrition

Personal Hygiene

Personal Fitness

Medication

Sexual health (8 modules available)

Consent

The intent of this education is to prepare people for the social, emotional and physical aspects of relationships with others while emphasizing the responsibilities involved. It will also promote a healthy understanding of human sexual development and enhance respect and appreciation of the self and others.

MVACL will ensure that the knowledge received by people we serve comes from a qualified information source and is philosophically consistent with this policy.

Educational material will be presented in a manner, which will promote effective communication. Details of the material will vary in complexity and extent to provide for the needs and abilities of the people involved. Individual learning programs may be devised for those who could benefit, in accordance with their ISPs.

Sexuality Training for Staff

Staff may receive a basic orientation on sexuality, which will provide factually correct information from a qualified information source that is consistent with this policy.

The intent of sexuality education would be to develop in staff sensitivity and maturity that would allow them to respond with confidence and composure to ordinary or more problematic situations within the realm of their work.

Staff/Individual Relationships

Professional integrity will govern all situations where physical interaction with people receiving support occurs. Physical contact is not allowed for purposes of educational instruction or for the personal advantage or satisfaction of a staff person. In all instances, staff will show respect for the person they support.

Staff Intervention and Problem-Solving

Individuals are encouraged to work out solutions to their own problems and to learn through their experiences and from the consequences.

It is the role of staff to intervene according to policy and procedures, in problematic situations such as:

* where consent is an issue
* the rights of an individual are compromised
* the health and safety of a person is jeopardized
* the legality of an activity is in question

It may be appropriate for staff to provide individual counseling in accordance with this policy in cases involving major decisions such as marriage, sterilization, parenting, abortion, birth control, acceptable behaviour and so on. It is also recognized that the ideas, values and biases of staff vary considerably and may interfere with all options being adequately represented.

The sensitive nature of such issues dictates that staff seeks supervisory input as well as advice from other qualified resources to help ensure the best outcomes.

Parental Involvement Regarding Adult Individuals

It is in the interest of the person, and a philosophical commitment of MVACL, to promote self-decision-making by people with a developmental disability. It is also the responsibility of the Association to protect the confidentiality of the people it serves.

Nevertheless, it is acknowledged that parents or guardians of people with developmental disabilities may be heavily involved for longer periods of time in the affairs of their adult children. The benefits of involving parents in various aspects of their son or daughter’s everyday programming, as well as in major decisions affecting their health and welfare are recognized.

Ideally parents and their sons or daughters would communicate sufficiently to comfortably discuss matters of sexuality; however this may not always be the case. Staff has the responsibility of protecting the rights of supported people to pursue their own lives, decisions and privacy. Staff is advised to consider parents or guardians as important contributors to the individual’s program planning, and to respect their values and how their ideas influence their son or daughter’s attitudes.