

Intimacy Matters™ Academy

Provider Leadership Certification

Module 3

Building an Organizational Culture That Supports Healthy Relationships

Module Length: 3 Hours

Module Overview

Organizational culture is reflected in what leaders reward, what staff believe, and what individuals experience every day. A person-centered culture does not merely permit healthy relationships—it intentionally supports dignity, autonomy, education, and informed choice.

This module helps leaders identify cultural barriers that unintentionally restrict the rights of people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) and provides practical strategies for creating an environment where healthy relationships are supported responsibly and respectfully.

Participants will explore how leadership behaviors, organizational values, language, staff attitudes, and environmental practices shape the experiences of individuals receiving services.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Define organizational culture and its influence on service delivery.
- Evaluate whether their agency's values support whole-person care.
- Recognize how leadership behaviors shape organizational culture.
- Identify language and practices that reinforce stigma or dignity.
- Foster an environment of respect, inclusion, and psychological safety.
- Recognize and address personal and organizational biases.
- Develop a culture improvement strategy that aligns with person-centered principles.

Module Agenda

Section 1 – What Is Organizational Culture?

Time: 20 Minutes

Opening Reflection

Ask participants:

“If someone visited your agency for one day, what would they learn about your organization’s beliefs regarding relationships, privacy, and sexuality?”

Allow responses.

Then explain:

Organizational culture is reflected in:

- Daily interactions
- Leadership decisions
- Staff behavior
- Policies
- Language
- Physical environment
- What is rewarded
- What is discouraged
- What people believe is “normal”

Teaching Point

Policies tell people what they may do.

Culture tells people what they actually do.

Section 2 – Leadership Sets the Tone

Time: 25 Minutes

Discussion

Ask:

“What messages do staff receive when leaders avoid conversations about sexuality?”

Examples may include:

- “Don’t bring it up.”
- “It’s too risky.”
- “Relationships create problems.”
- “Just separate them.”

Discuss how leaders influence culture by:

- Modeling respectful conversations
- Supporting education
- Addressing concerns without shame
- Reinforcing person-centered practices
- Encouraging thoughtful decision-making

Leadership Reflection

Complete the sentence:

“As a leader, people learn what I value by watching me...”

Participants share examples in small groups.

Section 3 – From Risk Avoidance to Relationship Support

Time: 25 Minutes

Present two organizational philosophies.

Organization A

- Dating discouraged
- Conversations avoided
- Privacy restricted
- Staff fearful
- No education
- Decisions driven by liability

Organization B

- Relationships acknowledged
- Education provided
- Consent taught
- Privacy respected
- Staff supported
- Decisions individualized

Activity

Participants identify the long-term impact of each approach on:

- Individuals
- Staff
- Families
- Agency culture

Section 4 – Language Matters

Time: 30 Minutes

Activity: Rewrite the Language

Provide common statements:

- “They’re like children.”
- “They don’t need to know about sex.”
- “We don’t allow dating.”
- “She doesn’t understand.”
- “He isn’t capable.”

Participants rewrite each statement using respectful, person-centered language.

Examples:

Instead of:

“They’re like children.”

Use:

“They are adults who may need individualized support with relationships and decision-making.”

Discussion

How does language influence expectations, opportunities, and respect?

Section 5 – Respect & Inclusion

Time: 20 Minutes

Discuss how respect is demonstrated through everyday practices.

Examples include:

- Knocking before entering bedrooms
- Respecting private conversations
- Addressing people as adults
- Using preferred names
- Supporting personal choices
- Including individuals in planning meetings
- Listening before deciding

Reflection

Ask:

“Would we treat a staff member this way?”

If not, why is it acceptable for a person receiving services?

Section 6 – Psychological Safety

Time: 25 Minutes

Teaching Point

Psychological safety means people feel comfortable asking questions, admitting uncertainty, and discussing sensitive topics without fear of ridicule or punishment.

Discuss how this applies to:

- DSPs
- Supervisors
- Leaders
- Families
- Individuals receiving services

Small Group Discussion

What prevents staff from talking openly about sexuality?

Examples:

- Fear of saying the wrong thing
- Lack of training
- Personal beliefs
- Fear of disciplinary action
- Unclear policies

Develop solutions together.

Section 7 – Eliminating Personal & Organizational Bias

Time: 35 Minutes

Self-Reflection Exercise

Participants complete a confidential worksheet.

Questions include:

- What messages did I receive growing up about sexuality?
- How does my culture influence my beliefs?
- How does my faith influence my leadership?
- Which relationships make me uncomfortable?
- Would I respond differently if the person did not have a disability?
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Do I unintentionally confuse discomfort with risk?

Discussion

Facilitator reminds participants:

Bias is not a sign of failure.

Unexamined bias becomes a barrier to person-centered support.

Leadership Lab

Agency Culture Assessment

Participants evaluate their organizations using a rating scale.

Statements include:

- Staff openly discuss sexuality professionally.
- Individuals are treated as adults.
- Privacy is respected consistently.
- Relationships are discussed during person-centered planning.
- Leaders model respectful language.
- Staff receive ongoing education.
- Families receive support and education.
- Agency policies align with organizational values.

Participants identify:

- Three organizational strengths
- Three barriers
- Three immediate opportunities for improvement

Workshop

Creating an Agency Vision Statement

Participants work in teams to draft a vision statement that reflects how their organization will support healthy relationships and sexuality.

Examples:

“We believe every person has the right to dignity, privacy, meaningful relationships, and informed choice. Our organization is committed to providing education, support, and person-centered services that promote healthy relationships while respecting individual rights and ensuring safety.”

Teams present their vision statements and receive feedback.

Culture Improvement Strategy

Each participant develops a practical action plan that includes:

Goal 1: Leadership

How will leadership model change?

Goal 2: Staff Development

How will staff be trained and supported?

Goal 3: Policy

What policies need to be reviewed or revised?

Goal 4: Individuals

How will people receiving services be educated and empowered?

Goal 5: Families

How will families and guardians be engaged?

Goal 6: Environment

What changes can be made to promote privacy, dignity, and healthy relationships?

For each goal, participants identify:

- Action steps
- Responsible person
- Timeline
- Resources needed
- Measures of success

Knowledge Check

Participants demonstrate understanding by:

- Explaining how organizational culture influences support.
- Identifying examples of respectful, person-centered language.
- Describing strategies for fostering psychological safety.
- Recognizing personal bias and its impact on decision-making.
- Presenting one actionable strategy for improving their agency's culture.

Module Closing Reflection

Ask participants to complete the following statement:

“One belief or practice I will challenge in my organization after today’s session is...”

Invite volunteers to share.

Close with this message:

“Policies establish expectations, but culture determines behavior. As leaders, we have the responsibility to create organizations where dignity is practiced, respect is modeled, and every individual is supported in living a full, meaningful, and connected life.”