

Section 4: Privacy & Dignity

Module 2 – Human Rights, Sexual Rights & Ethical Responsibilities

Time: 25 Minutes

Purpose

Privacy and dignity are essential human rights that should be upheld in every aspect of service delivery. Respecting an individual's privacy promotes autonomy, trust, self-worth, and healthy relationships.

Supporting privacy does not mean ignoring safety. Rather, it means creating environments where people can exercise their rights while receiving individualized supports that promote well-being.

As leaders, it is our responsibility to ensure that staff understand the difference between providing supervision and unnecessarily invading an individual's privacy.

Learning Objectives

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

- Define privacy and dignity within person-centered services.
 - Recognize everyday practices that either support or violate privacy.
 - Distinguish between supervision and unnecessary intrusion.
Identify organizational practices that unintentionally undermine dignity.
 - Develop strategies that promote respect while maintaining appropriate health and safety supports.
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Instructor Introduction

Suggested Script

"When we hear the word privacy, many of us immediately think about bedroom doors.

Privacy is much bigger than that.

Privacy is about respecting another person's humanity.

It means recognizing that every adult deserves personal space, confidential conversations, control over their body, and the opportunity to make personal

choices without unnecessary intrusion.

If we would not accept a practice for ourselves, we should carefully examine why we believe it is acceptable for someone receiving services.”

What Does Privacy Look Like?

Ask participants:

“What does privacy mean to you?”

Write responses on a flip chart.

After discussion, explain that privacy includes emotional, physical, informational, and relational privacy.

Topic 1: Knock Before Entering

Teaching Point

Every person deserves personal space.

Knocking demonstrates respect.

Waiting for permission to enter recognizes that the room belongs to the individual—not the staff.

Discussion

Instead of:

Walking directly into someone’s bedroom.

Support:

- Knock.
- Wait.
- Announce yourself.
- Respect the individual’s response whenever safely possible.

Reflection

Ask:

“Would you want someone entering your bedroom without knocking?”

Topic 2: Private Phone Conversations

Teaching Point

Adults have the right to private conversations.

Unless there is an individualized support need or documented safety concern, staff should not routinely listen to personal phone calls or read text messages.

Respectful Practices

- Offer private space.
- Avoid standing nearby to overhear conversations.
- Do not interrupt unless there is an immediate health or safety concern.
- Encourage healthy communication while respecting confidentiality.

Discussion

How can agencies balance safety while preserving privacy?

Topic 3: Confidential Medical Information

Teaching Point

Health information is personal.

Individuals should never have diagnoses, medications, or medical conditions discussed in front of others unless necessary for care.

Respectful Practices

Instead of:

"She has herpes."

Use:

"Let's discuss that privately."

Instead of discussing medications in the living room, move to a private office or another confidential setting.

Discuss how respecting confidentiality also builds trust.

Topic 4: Dating Conversations

Teaching Point

Relationships deserve the same level of respect as any other personal matter.

Avoid gossiping about:

- Who someone is dating
- Relationship problems
- Breakups
- Romantic interests

Encourage staff to support—not judge—these conversations.

Reflection

Would we discuss a coworker's dating life during a staff meeting?

Topic 5: Hygiene

Teaching Point

Personal care should always preserve dignity.

Support should be individualized and respectful.

Best Practices

- Explain each step before providing assistance.
- Offer choices whenever possible.
- Close doors and curtains.
- Cover body parts not being assisted.
- Ask permission before touching.

Discussion

How can staff provide assistance while maximizing independence?

Topic 6: Clothing Choices

Teaching Point

Clothing is an expression of identity.

Individuals should be encouraged to make personal choices while receiving education about dress expectations in different settings.

Instead of saying:

“You can’t wear that.”

Try:

“Let’s talk about what clothing might be most comfortable and appropriate for today’s activity.”

This approach teaches decision-making rather than taking control.

Topic 7: Masturbation Education

Teaching Point

Masturbation is a private behavior.

Education should focus on privacy, safety, hygiene, and boundaries—not shame.

Staff Should Teach

- Appropriate private locations
- Hand hygiene
- Cleaning personal items if used
- Respecting others’ privacy
- Understanding consent and boundaries

Avoid

- Punishing
- Shaming
- Yelling
- Public embarrassment

Key Message

The goal is to teach where and when—not to shame the individual.

Topic 8: Respectful Language

Activity

Read each statement aloud.

Ask participants:

"Would you keep this statement or change it?"

Examples:

"They're like children."

"They don't understand."

"We don't allow dating."

"She's too disabled."

"He acts like a baby."

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

Examples:

"They are an adult who may benefit from education and support."

"They communicate differently."

"Let's explore how we can safely support healthy relationships."

Teaching Point

Language influences expectations.

Expectations influence opportunities.

Opportunities influence quality of life.

Small Group Activity

Privacy Audit

Each table receives one environment to evaluate.

Examples:

- Bedroom
- Bathroom
- Living room
- Transportation

- Day Program
- Community outing

Questions

1. Where could privacy unintentionally be violated?
2. How can dignity be improved?
3. What policy changes may be needed?
4. What staff training is necessary?

Groups share recommendations.

Reflection Exercise

Ask participants to silently answer the following questions:

- Have I ever entered a room without knocking?
- Have I discussed someone's relationship unnecessarily?
- Have I spoken about someone's medical information where others could hear?
- Have I unintentionally embarrassed someone?
- Have I made decisions based on convenience instead of dignity?

Participants are encouraged to reflect without judgment.

Growth begins with awareness.

Closing Reflection

Ask the group:

"Would this practice be acceptable if it involved someone without a disability?"

Pause.

Then ask:

"If the answer is no...

Why have we accepted it here?"

Allow discussion.

Leadership Takeaway

Privacy is not simply about closed doors.

Privacy is communicated through our words, our actions, our policies, and our attitudes.

Organizations that consistently protect privacy create environments where individuals feel respected, valued, trusted, and empowered.

As leaders, we set the standard by asking one simple question before every decision:

“Does this protect the person’s dignity as much as it protects their safety?”