

Harm Reduction Guidelines for Practitioners working with Sex Worker Communities
Helping Individual Prostitutes Survive
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Harm Reduction (HR) is committed to addressing difficult problems while not compromising the quality and integrity of human life in all its rich and diverse complexity.

HIPS harm reduction work with sex workers embraces these basic tenets:

1. OUTREACH IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT.
2. HR accepts that some harm is inevitable.
3. HR provides non-judgmental information.
4. HR is about sex work rather than against sex work.
5. HR says to the worker you are normal .
6. HR says to the worker you are skilled .
7. HR says to the worker you are acting independently .
8. HR does not exaggerate dangers or minimize risks.
9. HR does not advocate zero tolerance.
10. HR does not always provide quick solutions and clear cut answers.

Ethical guidelines for case management are based on the self-in-relation theory of psychological development. This theory defines healthy connections as based on empathy, mutuality, equality and empowerment. This kind of connection results in growth fostering relationships.

Pitfalls:

1. It is unhelpful to direct or command the worker.
2. It is unhelpful to threaten the worker.
3. It is unhelpful to preach and moralize.
4. It is unhelpful to tell the sex worker how to solve the problem.
5. It is unhelpful to try to influence the worker with logical arguments.
6. It is unhelpful to judge, criticize or blame.
7. It is unhelpful to ridicule or shame the worker.
8. It is unhelpful to tell the worker what his/her motives are or why he/she is doing something.
9. It is unhelpful to try to make the worker feel better by talking him/her out of his/her feelings.
10. It is unhelpful to try to get the worker away from the problem by distracting, diverting or humoring her/him.

Guidelines:

1. It is helpful to validate the worker's feelings and perceptions.
2. It is helpful to model self care and positive relating skills.
3. It is helpful to notice the worker's strengths and bring them to his/her attention.
4. It is helpful to express interest and curiosity about aspects of the sex worker's life apart from prostitution.
5. It is helpful to identify ways in which he/she can protect and take care of herself/himself.
6. It is helpful to notice and reinforce progress towards better self care and self respect.
7. It is helpful to normalize the worker's decision to be in prostitution many see this as a solution to a problem (i.e. poverty, homelessness), not the problem itself.
8. It is helpful to observe and comment upon the worker's ability to trust you.
9. It is helpful to maintain boundaries appropriate to the relationship. This will foster protection for yourself and for the worker. This is also an opportunity to model appropriate boundaries for the worker.
10. It is important to set limits and to be clear with the worker about what is okay and what is not okay. Limit-setting also requires the assertiveness to be able to say no without feeling guilty.

Working with sex worker communities can be challenging. Building trust, understanding, and confidentiality are crucial to developing positive, educational interactions between organizations and workers. HIPS stands separate from law enforcement, community associations, researchers and legislators in that our goal is the health, well-being, and economic, social, physical empowerment of the individuals who engage in sex work.

HIPS has found that by embracing Harm Reduction philosophies, providing accurate information, helping sex workers realize existing options, and asserting the human dignity and rights of every individual, we provide the environment for true change and healthy decisions.

These guidelines and tenets help HIPS staff members negotiate our interactions and resist either demonizing or glorifying the realities of sex work. HIPS is a 501 (c) (3) organization in Washington, D.C., USA that provides education, support and referrals to street sex workers, assisting them in making healthy life choices and lead healthy, productive, self determined lives.

For more information, visit HIPS as www.HIPS.org or write to us at P.O. Box 21394
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