

PERSONAL CARE GUIDELINES

This document has been created for parents/guardians and respite / support workers with regards to providing personal care for children and youth with developmental disabilities. The intent of this resource is to provide some information and suggestions to create dialogue between parents/guardians and respite / support workers in developing and maintaining a positive personal care relationship with the children and youth in their care.

ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING APPROPRIATE BOUNDARIES IN SERVICE TO PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

INTRODUCTION

All human beings need touch. We need to be held. We need to hold. At the same time we need boundaries. We need to know our body is our own. We need to be in control of what happens to us, who touches us and under what circumstances we choose to be touched.

Those who provide direct care to people with developmental disabilities are often asked to be in private places performing personal care services. From bathing, to toileting, to dressing, we are necessarily in close proximity to those we serve. Given this situation, it is imperative that workers be aware of how to provide these services while maintaining appropriate professional boundaries.

It is also imperative that families/guardians of children and youth with developmental disabilities who hire a support or respite worker to provide care for their child to;

- do everything they can to support the development of a positive relationship between their child and a worker
- ensure that their child is comfortable with any worker in their home environment BEFORE requiring this worker to provide any personal care for their child without any parental or guardian supervision

Why are people with developmental disabilities vulnerable?

- A.** Potential for power imbalances
- B.** Potential for biases or stereotypes
- C.** Respecting everyone's ability to say "NO"

A. Potential for Power Imbalances

- People with developmental disabilities are at a greater risk since they usually depend on others or are taught to depend on others for the support they need.
- The chance of abuse increases with the degree of dependence that has been created.

B. Potential for Biases or Stereotypes

- All individuals, regardless of age and ability, have the capacity to make choices and advocate for themselves using both verbal and nonverbal means of communication.
- It is imperative that as a respite or personal care worker – you ensure that you communicate using whatever means is necessary and advantageous with the child or youth in your care.
- It is also important as a worker – that you communicate with the child or youth's parent(s)/guardian(s) on an ongoing basis to ensure continuity and consistency of care.

- It is also beneficial as a worker to reflect on an ongoing basis about what are your attitudes, beliefs, biases and potential stereotypes regarding “disability vs. ability” and how they may potentially impact your relationship with the child/youth in your care.

C. Respecting Everyone’s Ability to Say “NO”

- All individuals, regardless of age or ability, have the right to say “NO” or refuse any personal care that is provided to them through their words, actions and body language.
- As a respite or personal care worker – it is important you listen and respect when the child or youth in your care says “NO” using verbal or nonverbal means or declines to participate in a personal care task.
- It is also imperative that you as a worker, engage in ongoing dialogue with the child’s parent(s)/guardian(s) to get ongoing support and strategies to continue to support their child with any personal care tasks where ongoing refusal is occurring.

Personal Care Guidelines – Suggestions on Where to Start?

As personal care involves physical contact / touch as part of self-care routines including toileting, incontinent care, bathing/showering, dressing/undressing and personal hygiene – it is strongly recommended to consider the following:

- A contract or respite worker should only support a child and/or youth with personal care tasks AFTER there has been a period of time (to be determined in conjunction with the worker and the parent(s)/guardian(s)) where a relationship and trust can be developed.
- Personal care should only be provided with the informed and explicit consent of the person(s) or appointed parent(s)/guardian(s).
- That there is a discussion between the worker and the parent(s)/guardian(s) about what personal protective equipment (or PPE) (which can include items such as gloves, face masks, etc.) that needs to be provided to a respite or contract worker. The “Infection Prevention and Control” page of the Wellington Dufferin Guelph Public Health website can be a good resource regarding PPE at;

<https://wdgpublichealth.ca/healthcare-providers/covid-19-information-healthcare-providers/infection-prevention-and-control-ipac>

Personal Boundaries

It is imperative that respite workers possess healthy, clearly defined personal boundaries, and respect for the personal boundaries of the individual(s) for whom they provide care and support.

The attitude, approaches and manner of workers needs to be respectful.

Privacy is a Learned Skill

It is important as parent(s)/guardian(s) and respite workers – that we all work together to model and teach privacy to those we support.

As a respite worker – it is essential that you NOT share any information about the child/youth and family that you are supporting in any other context or environment.

PERSONAL CARE PRIVACY AND CONSENT

A child's or youth's right to privacy must be protected at all times. Exposure may be viewed as sexual abuse.

- Make sure clients dress, bathe and use the toilet in private.
- Knock before entering a room.
- Close doors and blinds.
- **ASK PERMISSION TO DO OR ASSIST.** Always ask to see and always ask to touch. Do not proceed if the client declines assistance by verbalizing "NO", uses other words or actions/body language to nonverbally indicated "NO".
- **WAIT FOR CONSENT.** (Even if the person you are supporting is non-verbal, allow them time to indicate with body language if this touch is okay.)
- **EXPLAIN EACH STEP OF ANY PROCEDURE** – what you are doing and why. As you pair your words with your actions - you will teach respectful touch.

Wheelchairs and Adaptive Devices

Respite or personal care workers should avoid leaning on or touching a client's wheelchair as well as any other adaptive devices (such as walkers, crutches, communication devices, etc.) without permission. All adaptive devices can be considered an extension of the person's body.

Hugging

People with disabilities often have a reduced sense of boundaries. You need to find respectful ways in which to clarify your role with those you serve so that they understand the boundaries in your relationship. This includes appropriate touch between worker and client.

It is imperative that workers and parent(s)/guardian(s) have ongoing conversations about appropriate touch between the worker and the child/youth receiving care and support.

Personal Care Concerns?

If there are any concerns about how personal care is being delivered to a child or youth, consider the following;

- Continue to dialogue and consult with the child's or youth's parent(s) or guardian(s) as well as applicable members of his/her health care team (including pediatrician, family physician, applicable medical specialist(s), occupational therapist, physiotherapist, speech therapist, behaviour therapist, etc.)
- Please review and refer to the **"Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: It's Your Duty"** document that the family/guardian will have in their SSAH orientation and information package. This document is also available at;
<https://cmhwww.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Reporting-child-abuse-neglect-updated-Aug.2021.pdf>
OR
http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/childrensaid/reportingchildabus eandneglect_EN.pdf