

Rights and Responsibilities

Supporting people with disabilities to exercise the same rights and responsibilities as all citizens can be challenging. Organizations are encouraged to start by establishing a philosophy and culture where all people are seen as equal and all decisions are made with great thoughtfulness.

Quality in Practice

Rights are fundamental to all people.

- Assure that all organization members understand that the concept of “rights” goes far beyond the initial training and annual review that is required in most state systems. Rights are all encompassing and are not restricted to “service” or “treatment” rights.
- Incorporate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and the constitution of your nation in your training and assure that all staff members, people supported, and other interested parties understand these documents.
- Establish a culture in which adults are seen and treated as adults regardless of their disability.
- Host on-going conversations about rights and responsibilities with staff members and people supported to improve people’s understanding of these issues.
- Write about rights and responsibilities in your organization’s newsletter regularly.
- Support people to become politically active through voting, writing letters to the editor, and working with or meeting with their legislative representatives at all levels of government.
- A person may choose to hire an attractive staff person, but the staff may not have the skills necessary to do the work well.
- Encourage people to think through these consequences and then support the person to experience the consequences for themselves. We learn best through our mistakes not our successes.
- Organizations have responsibilities too. We would restrict rights in the event a person is likely to harm herself or others or do property damage – in the same way we would restrict rights for anyone in the same situation. We stop people who are breaking the law or acting seriously irresponsibly – sitting in the middle of a street, driving while obviously drunk, etc.
- We **do not** restrict rights when people do things that are simply irresponsible or unwise – bouncing a check, marrying someone we don’t think is a good choice for them, quitting a job before having a new one to go to, and so on). Organizations have the responsibility to support people in all aspects of their life with all its messiness.

The exercise of rights carries with it responsibilities.

- Provide opportunities for people to think about their rights in all situations and the responsibilities that result from the choices they make.
 - People may choose to carry all the money they have for spending this month with them, but if they spend it all in one day they will not have more for later in the month.
 - A person may choose to get married and will have to manage the possible loss of social security benefits that could occur.
 - Someone may choose to drink alcohol, but may have to go to work with a hangover the next morning.
- Adult people do not have to prove themselves before they have the right to exercise most rights. There are no “competency” requirements for marrying, managing your own money, living on your own, or most other things. Many people may need support to accomplish those things, but they do not have to prove anything.
- Any requirements that include “meeting this goal or that goal before you can ...” must be seriously reconsidered. The questions that accompany that consideration include: is the organization or team or guardian expecting more from this person than other citizens and are their rights being restricted?

Assure that conversations and decisions around rights and responsibilities are real.

Rights and Responsibilities (continued)

- Support people to gain skills in accomplishing those things that do require competency requirements. Obtaining a driver's license requires that all citizens meet certain criteria and pass certain tests. Many jobs require mastering a set of skills. Organizations should work creatively to support the person to learn those skills necessary to meet their dreams before rejecting the idea as being "unrealistic". People have the right to try those things and fail.
- Assure that whenever a person expresses dissatisfaction (verbally or behaviorally) with anything (where they live, where they work, how they socialize, who they live with, what progress they have made toward reaching their dreams) the people supporting that person raise questions about rights. Are any rights being violated at this time? If the person did not have a disability, how might they handle their dissatisfaction? What supports might be available to them in this situation? How can the organization support this person to use those supports?
- Rights and responsibilities are complex and often changing. Assure that organizational members take these issues seriously and have the time and resources to understand them fully.

Provide access to legal counsel or advocacy whenever a person faces due process.

- People have the right to legal counsel or advocacy at every court hearing, at every human rights committee meeting, and at any other legal proceeding.
- Legal counsel or advocacy can be found through the Protection and Advocacy system, through the local Legal Aid office, by requesting pro bono (for free) work from a local law office, or through the local or state Arc chapter.