

**GENESEE VALLEY REGIONAL CENTER**  
**POLICY AND PROCEDURE MANUAL**

ITEM #63

Revised 3/15/2017

TO: All Staff

FROM: Fred Woelmer, Director

SUBJECT: Philosophy of Discipline: Guidelines and Absolutes

Policy: Institutional youth are generally hurt and angry young people, whose behavior often requires the exercise of legitimate external controls. Because we are trying to teach young people respect and concern for themselves and others, it is vitally important that discipline controls, when they become necessary, be administered within a framework of respect and concern.

Discipline, in a positive sense, is protective and educative in nature, it is administered in order to prevent harm to persons or property, to help a youth regain control, and to teach responsibility for behavior. By contrast, “discipline” that is punitive or demeaning is dehumanizing and ultimately destructive of our responsibilities to youth.

Staff are never to discipline in any of the following manners:

- Denying any essential program services.
- Denying visits if they are not confined in a behavior management room.
- Denying shelter, clothing, or essential personal needs.
- Denying the opportunity for at least 8 hours of sleep in a 24 hour period.
- Withhold food or creating special menus for behavior management.

Procedures:

A. Staff Discretion and its Limitations

Staff are encouraged to exercise discretion, judgment, and sensitivity to the needs of individual youth in constructing appropriate disciplinary situations. In the application of discretionary authority it should remain clear, however, that there are absolute limits.

- (1) Staff shall never subject youth to corporal punishment, the threat of corporal punishment, or to any form of cruelty, mental or physical. (Such behaviors include, but are not limited to, striking, beating, slapping, spanking, and enforced immobility such as standing at attention, or activity that is demeaning or humiliating.
- (2) Staff are fully responsible for youth under their supervision, and shall not permit youth to subject other youth to corporal punishment, the threat of corporal punishment, or to any form of cruelty -- mental or physical.

B. Group Intervention and the Preventing Escalation of Harmful Behavior

The “Group Process”, as designed for use at GVRC, utilizes the resident groups to provide a positive influence on their group member’s thinking and behavior. Residents are expected to observe their peer’s and to initiate an “intervention” by pointing out to group members when they see that their behavior may lead to hurting themselves or others, This process is commonly referred to as “checking” someone or asking them to “take a look at their behavior”.

Staff must establish the expectation within the group that these “checks” are done in a caring manner and not as a form of attacking or aggravating a peer. Asking a peer to take a look at their behavior is a request and not a demand that the recipient of the check admit wrong doing. Group members have the responsibility to explain how they see a behavior as being harmful. The recipient of the check has the responsibility to take a look at the behavior and state how they do, or don’t, see their behavior as harmful or becoming harmful.

If the youth being checked agrees, states the harmful behavior, and commits to trying not to show the behavior, the process has successfully made an intervention. Successful interventions should not normally be followed by any consequence or punishment. If a group member points out a harmful behavior to a peer in the hope that it will help that person not show a harmful behavior and as a result, that person receives a sanction; the caring person is likely to feel like a “snitch” and less likely to check a peer in the future. The non-caring youth who checks a peer with the hope of aggravating that peer must be confronted for this behavior by their group and/or staff.

The discussion of a behavior should be limited to the group, or group member, explaining how they see the behavior as leading to becoming harmful and adding any clarifying points. The same opportunity for explanation should be given to the recipient. When there are no more points to be made, the discussion should end. Continuing pointless discussion and/or not allowing residents to express themselves promotes a feeling of helplessness in the recipient of a check and often escalates to frustration, anger, and verbal or physical acting out behavior.

Similar feelings and harmful behavior often occur when a resident is required to admit wrong doing; when the resident does not agree either that the behavior occurred or that the behavior was becoming harmful. The Group Process asks that the resident accept the request to take a look at their own behavior and not that the resident must admit to wrong thinking or doing. If a resident does not agree with the group’s observations the group, or staff, should ask if the resident can commit to thinking about what was pointed out, controlling the behavior, and to talk about the situation in group meeting. If the resident cannot make this commitment, the staff must make a decision as to if the individual resident or the group are mature enough to continue with program with the group member in the group or if the group member must be removed from the group.

Staff should not encourage the thought that some checks are invalid. This gives support to group member’s thought that they are justified in acting out when they disagree with a group member’s observation. Staff should encourage the recipient of a check to consider it, listen to the points of the group, and agree or disagree. This process also helps residents learn to disagree in a socially acceptable manner and they don’t have to act out to make a point. Group members, who do check their peers to aggravate, lose the power to aggravate when the group members understand that they are not forced to agree with what is being pointed out by the aggravator.

Staff should NOT allow the attention of the group to focus on the member who is using checks to aggravate. The focus should be on the person who received the check until they have either agreed to what the aggravating peer has pointed out, or has agreed to take a look at the issue and then discuss it with the group later. The group may need to help the recipient of the check understand they don't have to act out to feel they are in control and that there is a positive way to disagree.

If it is the opinion of the group, group members, or staff that an individual group member is using checks to aggravate, the group must use the same process. They point out the observation and give the group member the same opportunities to listen, consider, and decide if they can agree or at least commit to controlling the behavior being pointed out. Group members shall never be allowed to discipline their peers and groups shall never be disciplined for the misbehavior of individual group member.

Establishment of the above elements, as well as understanding the concept of helping and not aggravating, are the keys to having an effective group intervention and de-escalation, process that limits or prevents acting out behavior.

C. Physical Restraint

Verbal efforts to calm the youth should be used to avoid use of restraints; however, temporary physical restraint is appropriate to protect people and property when a youth is physically out of control. Appropriate restraint may be applied by staff directly.

Appropriate restraint for an out of control youth should be benign and protective in nature, and it should be continued only for the minimum period of time necessary in order to permit a youth to regain self-control.

D. Use of Mechanical Restraint Devices

Mechanical restraints must never be applied as punishment and are applied only as a precaution against escape during transfer; to prevent self-injury, injury to others, or property damage; and should not be applied for more time than is absolutely necessary.

E. Use of Behavior Management Room

Restriction of a resident to a Behavior Management Room may only occur when the resident is physically out of control and in danger of harming himself or others. The room should only be used for the time needed to change the behavior compelling its use.

F. Use of Chemical Restraints

Chemical restraints should only be utilized upon physician's orders.

G. Less Lethal or Less Than Lethal Restraints or Deterrents

The use of restraint or deterrent systems such as pepper spray and tasers should never be allowed within the Genesee Valley Regional Center.

This policy and procedure is available to any resident, parent, or placing agency upon request and is also available on the GVRC County web site.