



Self-Care & Community Care



POINT SOURCE YOUTH

POSITIVE ACTION



This chapter is part of Point Source Youth’s National Youth Mentorship and Peer Navigation Initiative handbook. Created with the help of our National Youth Advocates, and funded by ViiV Healthcare’s Positive Action for Youth (PAFY) Grant, this handbook was developed to train and support hundreds of youth mentors to provide peer navigation and support related to HIV-prevention, treatment, and care and housing to QTBIPOC youth. Click here to access the full handbook, with chapters on Youth Mentorship and Best Practices, HIV Peer Navigation Best Practices, Self-Care and Community Care, and more.

[Access the full handbook here.](#)

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SELF-CARE & COMMUNITY CARE

Throughout this handbook, we hope that you've learned valuable lessons to start or improve your own youth mentorship and HIV peer navigation services.

Most of us got into this work because we care deeply about helping young people and want to do everything in our power to help them succeed. While this is very noble, sometimes **the most helpful thing we can do as service providers is give young people the room to make decisions.**

Young people in your programs have the right to make their own decisions (and mistakes), even if you don't agree with them. Our role is to help provide them with resources, options, and guidance to make that process a little easier.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is the idea that people can meet their potential by fulfilling their needs for connection, autonomy, and competence. Self-determination also requires that people have an intrinsic need to grow and gain mastery over life's challenges, which is vital for developing a sense of self. Lastly, autonomous motivation is important in achieving self-determination because it means that we need an internal drive to fulfill our potential to be independent.

We think it's important to define self-determination because we believe the young person being offered services is the expert in their own life. They need the right resources from your organization to make an informed decision about their health and overall stability.

Therefore, we encourage you to reconnect with the reason you decided to serve this population. We want to underscore how vital the services and relationships are to the young people being served, and we recognize that the young person will make decisions that cause the provider concern (i.e., placing themselves in harmful situations, not taking their HIV medications, or ghosting providers, etc.)

Nevertheless, the young person is an adult and should be in the driver's seat of their treatment and services. It's important that the Youth Mentor and HIV Peer Navigator understand their roles as mandated reporters and the fact that they are part of a team of professionals who are available to make tough calls. More than anything else, the young person should feel empowered to understand their choices, the roles of each person on their service team, and the timeline in which they can expect to receive the services they need.

Mandated reporters are required to report reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect in children, disabled persons, or elderly adults. More often than not, the young people you serve will not fall into these categories.

Self-Care

We encourage the Youth Mentor and HIV Peer Navigator to think of the self-care they needed when they were first encountering their lived experience and ask themselves, “what do I know now that I wish I knew then?” This knowledge can help the Youth Mentor understand the importance of helping the young person establish realistic self-care routines.

It’s also important for the Youth Mentor to ask the young person, “what do you do to take care of yourself and escape the thoughts of the day?” If the young person struggles with this answer, these [grounding techniques](#) can be a helpful resource.

Community Care

Working with young people living with HIV is an enormous undertaking given the best practice approaches we have covered in this handbook, and it requires a holistic approach. This means that providers must remember that [coordinated community care is essential when a young person is in crisis and in need of services](#).

Therefore, we recommend that you make connections with Youth Action Boards and other organizations that provide housing, healthcare, employment, education, and legal services. Network with one another to ensure that the resources provided to the young people results in a warm hand off.

Sex Work is Work

Sex workers are adults who receive money or goods in exchange for consensual sexual services or performances. Sex work can be provided in person or indirectly online. Some young people may not consider these activities “sex work” and instead, as one youth advocate described it, “I’m on the streets and I need food or a place to sleep”. In addition, young people may not consider their actions “sex work” until years later. Others may genuinely enjoy it because it brings them pleasure.

Therefore, we want to underscore the importance of terminology. Providers should practice caution when asking about sex work and should follow the young person’s lead. As a resource, this video is a good places to start when thinking about [what the public should know about sex work](#).

Depending on your organization’s funding sources, you may be required to ask the young person about their income at intake. However, they may not be ready to share these details with you because intake is the moment in time when you are explaining the services that will be offered, the details of the program, and explaining your role as a provider.

We recommend that you ask questions, like “how do you get by?” or “how do you support yourself?”

We encourage you to focus your efforts on establishing rapport with the young person and enlisting them in the services needed. In the meantime, be sure to research [resources and service providers](#) that are well versed in providing support to sex workers.

In addition, we urge you to view sex work through a harm reduction lens as it relates to obtaining and maintaining housing. We’ve outlined throughout this handbook how stigma about HIV impacts a young

person's ability to get services once they test positive. Therefore, we advocate that organizations that provide housing create policies that keep youth safe. More specifically, we ask that you consider revisiting your policies to determine if there are rules that prohibit young people from creating income in ways that are empowering and sustainable to them - which can sometimes be sex work; this can include stripping, online work, or consensual sexual services.

Is Sex Work Legal?

The case for making it against the law to buy sex begins with the premise that sex work is based on a system of exploitation, and is therefore demeaning to sex workers. The argument there is that legalizing sex work helps "pimps", and thereby fails to protect sex workers and leads to more back-alley violence, not less.

This is completely inaccurate, as it refers to human trafficking, not sex work. Sex work and human trafficking are not interchangeable terms, they mean different things.

Point Source Youth believes strongly in the need to decriminalize sex work. Here's a good video to watch that explains the difference between [decriminalization and legalization](#). Additionally, this [fact sheet](#) helps explain the many reasons why sex work should be decriminalized.

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The infographic features two overlapping circles on a red background. The left circle is teal and labeled 'SEX WORK' with a large white 'YES' written over it. The right circle is pink and labeled 'TRAFFICKING' with a large white 'NO' written over it. A yellow circle overlaps the bottom of both. A list of seven questions is centered in the overlapping area. A yellow circle on the left contains a note about sex workers in dangerous situations. At the bottom, contact information for the National Human Trafficking Hotline is provided.

SEX WORK

TRAFFICKING

YES

NO

Did they willingly enter the sex work field?

Are they in control of their working conditions?

Are they in control of their profits?

Can they safely access necessities or medical assistance without fear of someone harming them?

Are they in control of their identification paperwork and/or knowledge of their Immigration Status?

Are they able to set boundaries such as harm limits, soft limits, required limits, or timed limits?

Are they allowed to speak for themselves or revoke consent?

This is not to disregard sex workers in dangerous situations, but to acknowledge that consensual sex work is not trafficking.

For help, call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1.88.373.7888 or text HELP to BeFree (233733),
For more information visit www.stopthetraffik.org

Queer Sex Ed: Sex Worker Advocacy facilitated by Xander Briere, a Program Specialist at the San Francisco Community Health Center. To learn more or invite Xander as a facilitator please reach out at xander@sfcommunityhealth.org.

Ending the stigma

In order to end stigma of sex work, providers must understand that sex workers are capable of agency and independence in their actions. As a provider it's super important that you challenge any internal narrative or bias that sex workers are being victimized.

Isolation remains a big problem among sex workers, primarily caused by the stigma attached to the profession. Recognizing that they have agency and can make their own consensual decisions can reduce stigma.²

Precautions

If a young person acknowledges they participate in sex work as a form of income, be prepared to talk with them about PeP and PrEP. Other precautions include proper condom use, frequent testing of STDS and HIV, and other harm reduction strategies (i.e. services or performances that reduce the exposure of STDS or HIV)

Impact of an HIV diagnosis

If a young person who participates in sex work is diagnosed with HIV, it's important that they understand your state's law regarding partner notification. They may need to create another plan for making income, via employment, public assistance, food stamps, or other benefits they may be entitled to because of their HIV status.

We also recommend that a [safety plan](#) be implemented and constant communication is provided to ensure the young person remains safe, and understands that they will be able to live a good life despite their diagnosis.

ENDNOTES

1 "Queer Sex Ed: Sex Worker Advocacy" facilitated by Xander Briere, a Program Specialist at the San Francisco Community Health Center. To learn more or invite Xander as a facilitator please reach out at xander@sfcommunityhealth.org

2 <https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/sex-work-is-real-work-and-its-time-to-treat-it-that-way>