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# IS SANCTUARY “TOO SOFT” ON KIDS?

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In training Sanctuary we are sometimes asked if the tenants of the model contribute to environments that are “too soft” in respect to discipline of residents, and by extension facilitate environments that lack structure, routine, and accountability.

For the most part these concerns seem to stem largely from misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the precepts of shared governance, flattened hierarchy, and open communication. Often times these concepts are misconstrued with the end product being the belief that the residents should make all decisions, and that staff have no power or control.

In rebuffing these concerns it is important to consider a number of extremely important core considerations, among the more pertinent:

- Sanctuary is an organizational model for positive change and growth that espouses **safety** as a key value and aspiration, both in terms of safety within the environment and safety within relationships.
- Sanctuary recognizes that safety is a multi faceted concept which includes physical, psychological, moral, social, and emotional dimensions.
- In order to create and maintain environments that are (1) Secure, (2) Consistent, and (3) Promote positive outcomes, each dimension of safety must be accounted for and integrated into the fabric of the program.
- Safety is a critical consideration due to the implications trauma has on humans in general and children in particular. The lingering impacts of trauma impair such key capacities as trust, proactive thought, self-reflection, communication, and one’s sense of personal power, safety, and efficacy.
- Ultimately it is deficiencies in these core areas, among others, that create the highly reactive, often aggressive and hyper-guarded behavior patterns we so often observe in our clients.
- Sanctuary utilizes the seven commitments, the SELF model, and trauma-informed care to foster environments that recognize and attend to these patterns of behavior and their underlying causes. In so doing, Sanctuary utilizes open communication, shared governance, and flattened hierarchy as tools to empower clients and

promote a sense of personal control, power, and influence, which ultimately reduces the hyper vigilant, aggressive responses so often observed in our client base.

- In time, as clients perceive greater degrees of internal control, enhanced decision making, and safety in their immediate environments treatment may then address the larger injuries experienced through the course of events that led them to care.
- **An important point to maintain is that recovery and healing can not occur “in a tornado”, and as such routine, structure, and accountability are key components of an intelligent, treatment-based, social learning environment.** Discipline, safe decision making, and healthy relationships based on mutual respect are cornerstones to effective and sustainable growth and change.
- The concepts of shared governance, flattened hierarchy, and open communication do not dictate that clients make the final decisions - that is the role reserved for staff.
- What these concepts do suggest is that clients be given a voice in decisions that affect them. As one astute observer has said, “People support what they help to create”. This need to participate in our own affairs is a part of human nature. Promoting the positive employment of one’s own personal power is an important component of the Sanctuary Model. Such a strategy enhances the potential of investment, and the internalization of different and safer modes of interacting with the external world for clients. Staff are still directed to hold clients (and themselves) to account, but to do so in a manner that is not provocative, inflammatory, hypocritical or hurtful - in short, presentation counts and the ancient maxim, “Do onto others as you would have them do onto you” applies to everyone in a Sanctuary community – administrators, staff, children, and families.