

Tips for Service Providers as presented at the Survival Sex Workshop 12/9 by PSKS Interns

- Needs based sexual activities are very complex and personal. Service providers must understand that the people who are involved in sex work are not always outward about their involvement or about asking for support. Providers should be deliberate about compiling resource lists of support available to people involved in sex work or who have been sexually traumatized. New intakes should be made aware of the resources available to them (counseling, healthcare, OPS) whether or not they indicate that they are involved in needs based sexual activities.
- Directly ask people who access services at your space if they are having trouble meeting all of their needs. Offer them advice and assistance in meeting that your service cannot provide.
- Avoid using labels such as “prostitute”, “bitch”, “whore”, “hooker”, “sex worker”. These terms engrain an individual’s self-perception of themselves as that. People who engage in sex work are just trying to survive and do not want to associate/identify themselves with these labels. These words are also triggering and derogatory.
- Since there are varying levels of openness about sex work, make info available to those who are not comfortable seeking support from professionals. Post safety tips, health tips, risk reduction tips, resources guides, and posters promoting self-empowerment in visible locations around your space.
- Use your space and resources to educate people about Accountability, Entitlement, Privilege, and Sexual Oppression. Post fliers in visible spaces, host events featuring trainers/speakers to educate buyers about their privilege, to unlearn sexism/sexual dominance, and to become allies of sexually subordinated people.
- Monitor conversations and interactions in your space. Sexualized conversations, sexually derogatory language, and certain “jokes” can be very triggering to people who are sexually traumatized. It should be made clear in your space that such language is harmful. There should be no toleration for disrespect or ignorance.
- Suggest alternative forms of employment. Many people who sustain themselves through sex work are uncomfortable with the structure and environment of conventional work places. Encourage them to sell arts and crafts on the streets and at farmer’s markets, to play music or recite their poetry on the street (busking). Help people find gigs as house-cleaners, doing odd-jobs, babysitting, etc.
- Many people involved in sex work identify as LGBTQI. Make sure that your staffs are culturally competent and sensitive to LGBTQI issues. Have a comprehensive resource list of services for LGBTQI and open and affirming service providers. Ask participants if they are interested in services and support available to the LGBTQI community.

It is very important to communicate in a manner that youth can identify with, and be careful to not let your thoughts about their decisions influence how you support them. It’s best to suggest resources that you personally have evaluated for being positive and affirming environments for those engaged in needs-based sexual activity. Empowerment is key, so be sure to use positive language and avoid any sort of patronizing or negative statements. Also do not attempt to pry information or details about the youths’ experiences, or directly ask if they are involved in survival sex. Some have probably had very negative experiences disclosing their activities to peers in the past, and as a result will decide not to disclose their involvement to anyone else. That is why it is important to present sexual health resources to all youth regardless of identity.