



ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT

VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK

Alternatives to Violence Project / New York

Volunteer Handbook

Many of us who have been involved with the AVP experience find great joy in doing so. We recognize that the workshops, whether in prison, school or community settings, create a world not often found in our daily encounters—one that often evokes new feelings and questions. This Volunteer Handbook has evolved from individual documents produced over the years by the AVP/New York Board Council to address specific concerns and needs. The coordinators and ultimately the AVP/NY Board Council are responsible to the NYS Department of Correctional Services for the behavior of our volunteers in prison, and to the community groups that invite us into schools and other community settings. That is why this handbook focuses on providing information for greater understanding and thereby avoiding the pitfalls that might make your experience as a volunteer uncomfortable, and which might diminish AVP's reputation as an organization. We have put it in a format that allows coordinators of workshops to use specific portions as handouts.

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Part 1: Volunteering in Prison

A. Origins of the Alternatives to Violence Project

The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) began in 1975 when a group of prisoners at Green Haven Prison (NY) sought to work with young prisoners to avert violent conflict. They collaborated with the Quaker Project on Community Conflict and devised a prison workshop. The success of this workshop quickly generated requests for more, and AVP was born. At this writing, AVP has active programs in 39 states and in more than sixty countries on six continents.

AVP, a non-denominational program, is based on Transforming Power—a power that can work through any one of us to change us for the better.

AVP offers experiential workshops that aim to empower individuals to liberate themselves and others from the burden of violence in all of its forms and manifestations. Workshops take place in prisons, schools and communities. They are typically 18—23 hours over three days, but shorter mini-workshops may be tailored to fit the audience, venue or time available.

There are three levels of workshops: Basic, Second Level (Advanced) and Training for Facilitators. AVP workshops begin with exercises that build community, and continue with activities that help participants come to new ways of thinking about choices. Some participants may elect to take the Training for Facilitators workshop, after which they may become apprentice facilitators and work on teams with more experienced facilitators to lead workshops.

Facilitator Recognition - When the lead facilitators determine that an apprentice has sufficient skill and experience, she or he will be awarded a gold certificate, which signifies recognition as a full facilitator.

B. How to Become an AVP Volunteer in New York State Prisons

You may be eligible to volunteer in NYS prisons through the Alternatives to Violence Project if you are at least 21 years old and do not visit or correspond with anyone who is currently incarcerated in NYS prisons.

1. Contact the AVP/NY office at 800-909-8920 or info@avpny.org. The Office Administrator will conduct a telephone interview and answer any questions. She will put you in contact with the AVP Outside (civilian) Coordinator of the prison you are interested in volunteering in. The Outside Coordinator will also interview you and may ask to meet in person.
2. If the Outside Coordinator is clear to move forward, he or she will put you in touch with the DOCCS Volunteer Services Coordinator who will send you an application. Fill it out completely. You will need to give names of references. You will need to sign that you will abide by the prison's rules and regulations. If you have been incarcerated, you will need to fill out an additional form. At this writing, a person must be out of prison for at least a year before being allowed back into prison as a volunteer.
3. Volunteers will be fingerprinted at the prison where they have applied for volunteer status. A background check will be run.
4. Annual tuberculosis (TB) tests are required; these can be scheduled at the prison free of charge or at a county health office for a nominal fee. All prisons require a picture ID. Regulations with respect to food (what may be allowed in) and clothing (what may be worn in) vary from prison to prison.
5. The Volunteer Services Coordinator at the prison will give you an orientation, primarily focused on security for yourself, other volunteers, prisoners and guards. It is important to take this very seriously. The freedoms you are accustomed to on the outside are not carried with you into prison. Much of that material is covered in this handbook.
6. Once you have been approved by a prison administration, notify the AVP Outside Coordinator that you have been approved by the prison administration as a volunteer. She or he will request that your name be put on the gate clearance and tell you when to be where. You should arrive early to the appointed meeting place so as to be sure not to hold up the group, since our time inside as a group is limited and valuable.
7. AVP encourages all its volunteers to participate in support groups and facilitator meetings where our learning and understanding can grow.

C. Helpful Terms to Know Before Going into Prison

Gate Clearance – paperwork that allows civilians entry into prison, as well as supplies they may bring in. Your name is put on a gate clearance by the staff advisor or another prison administrator. The officers at the prison gate will check the gate clearance to make certain you may be allowed in.

Contraband – anything that is NOT on the gate clearance. Attempts to hide contraband may result in both you and the AVP program being suspended from that prison.

Event Package – put together by a prison administrator and contains all the information about the event: the outside attendees (civilians), the prisoners attending, the hours, the rooms, what meals are provided; it must be approved by both the prison administration and security. The packages are distributed to all the blocks, cottages or dorms, informing prisoners of the event.

NYS Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) Volunteer Services Coordinator – prison staffperson who registers new volunteers and should inform volunteers of their volunteer status and the requirements necessary to maintain their volunteer status, such as annual TB testing.

NYS Department of Correctional Services (DOCS) Staff Advisor – the administrative support person for the program. To varying degrees, staff advisors do the administrative tasks needed to keep the program running and in compliance with prison regulations. He or she is the contact person for inside/outside coordinators.

COs - Correction Officers or guards. Correction Officer is the preferred term.

Call out – the paperwork that permits a prisoner to attend an event, class, or program.

Inside Coordinator(s) – the inside (prisoner) facilitator who is responsible for the AVP program inside the prison. The inside coordinator puts the names on the event package and takes care of all paperwork for the program. He or she is also the spokesperson/liaison to the prison administration and the outside volunteers.

Outside Coordinator – the civilian volunteer responsible for the AVP program: recruits and coordinates civilian participants and facilitators, works with the inside coordinator to schedule workshops and interface with the prison administration, and is responsible to the AVP/NY Board Council for the behavior of AVP volunteers.

Workshop – AVP event with anywhere from two to eight sessions (usually 2½ hours/session), ideally eight sessions held over three consecutive days,

Exercise – serious activity done by the group that stimulate thought and may help participants and facilitators discover what is true for us individually and collectively.

Light and Lively – exercise designed to pick up the energy, lighten the mood and build community. We usually do one in every session at an appropriate point.

Facilitator – leads by making the workshop experience “facile” or “easy.”

AVP/NY Board Council – body appointed to govern the AVP/NY organization. Members are at-large, representatives of the regional AVP/NY Area Councils and representatives of New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends.

AVP/NY Area Council – body of facilitators that have responsibility for publicizing, fund-raising for and overseeing the AVP programs within their geographical region. Each area council appoints one representative (and one alternate, if desired) to serve on the AVP/NY Board Council.

D. AVP/NY Orientation of Volunteers Going into Prison

1. AVP sees prisoners, not as criminals, but as human beings who have been convicted of crimes. AVP/NY's orientation reflects this perspective.
2. AVP is founded upon the Quaker precept: to recognize and respond to the inherent good in every person whether it is evident or not. This is the foundation of AVP and is demonstrated through our respect for one another.
3. Direct, honest, compassionate communication between AVPers is the bedrock upon which the quality of an AVP workshop rests. Learning to speak truth with compassion and living respect for one another is a life-long process and one in which each of us is engaged.
4. AVP recognizes the equality of all who participate in AVP—participant and facilitator, civilian and prisoner. AVP also acknowledges that those who are incarcerated live within a set of restrictions that AVP must also live within whether or not we agree with those restrictions. Some of those restrictions:

Do not bring in contraband. (By definition, "contraband" is anything brought in without being cleared by the prison administration in advance.)

Do not give gifts to individual prisoners or deliver notes or other messages for them. There are good security reasons for this that you might not suspect. Many items are used as money, and others might enable a prisoner to hide a weapon.

Respect confidentiality with prison personnel as well as with prisoners. Do not discuss prison policy with prisoners. Do not discuss prisoners' concerns with prison staff.

Do not interfere with prison discipline (you can always take things up with prison officials later if necessary).

5. It is not AVP/NY's purpose to change these restrictions. Prison is a rigid environment with strict rules and regulations, which AVP volunteers must follow. The prison administration is responsible for the security of the prison itself and everyone within it, including prisoners. Questioning of NYS Department of Correctional Services' rules and regulations shall be done through the AVP outside coordinator together with the AVP/NY Board Council.
6. Volunteers should not violate any NYS Department of Correctional Services and/or AVP policies in order to establish personal relationships with prisoners outside of AVP workshops and support sessions. Within AVP workshops and support sessions we seek to create community—it is the basis of nonviolence.
7. In spite of any agreed-upon arrangements with the prison administration, the people who are on duty (Correction Officers or COs) at any particular moment have authority. Volunteers should endeavor to establish a clear, positive relationship with them. Serious problems can be addressed at a later time with the AVP outside coordinator and the prison administration.

8. Some expectations AVP/NY has regarding our outside (civilian) volunteers:

Do not carry in unnecessary valuables (among other things, these could be a temptation to someone who is trying to change his or her life, and we do not wish to add to her or his problems).

Do not give out personal addresses or phone numbers—your own or anyone else's. Remember that nothing is truly private in a prison, and even if the person you give it to is reliable, it could be stolen.

Do not take blank AVP certificates into a prison and leave them around unwatched. These also may end up in the prison bartering system.

Do dress modestly. Men and women should avoid tight-fitting or revealing clothing. Men should wear shirts that tuck into their pants. What is acceptable in our everyday lives may not be appropriate in an environment where people are denied free access to relationships. Also, outside volunteers should not wear prison green clothing.

9. AVP/NY is governed by its Board Council. Each AVP/NY Area Council has oversight responsibility for the workshops that take place within its geographic region.
10. Orientation and debriefing of outside volunteers is the responsibility of the particular prison administration.
11. Volunteers may not use AVP as a vehicle to introduce their own programs into prisons.
12. *Outside volunteers should be aware that under NY State law concerning sex offenses, incarcerated persons are considered in the same category as people under the age of consent; A staff member or outside volunteer who has sexual contact with an incarcerated person can be indicted for a sex crime.*

E. Through the Eyes of Long-time AVP Prison Volunteers: Understanding the Experience

1. Prison is, to outsiders, a foreign country. As in any foreign country, it is wise to be quiet, observe, listen, learn the language and identify the values of the prison culture before advancing too many strong opinions or taking any drastic action.
2. Don't be afraid to define yourself clearly. You are not required to be all things to all people at all times, or to live up (or down) to any stereotype prisoners may have about you as an outsider. You are entitled, moreover, to define for yourself and for others what you choose to be or not to be, do or not to do. This will take some time, but you should be aware of the need to do it from the beginning of your prison volunteering. Even after you have clearly defined yourself, expect to be tested, again and again. Eventually, however, if you are firm in sticking to your definition of yourself, others will adjust to it.
3. Expect to meet many tremendous and valuable people in prison. Expect also to meet some champion manipulators. Do not be surprised if these sometimes turn out to be one and the same person. Manipulation is a form of survival for the powerless.
4. Especially at first, people may find it helpful, as soon as possible after volunteering in a prison, to share with a trusted friend the feelings generated by the prison experience. It is a rare person who does not experience anger, fear, pain, outrage, wonder, and other strong emotions upon contact with the prison environment. These feelings, shared, can lead to much that is constructive and rewarding. Unshared, they can lead to emotional burnout and ill-considered actions.
5. People can expect to feel an unfamiliar, very heady and very addictive "super star" feeling, especially at first in a prison. It may arise from sexuality in a deprived environment or from the unfamiliar power that comes from knowledge of another world. Remember that as an AVP facilitator, you may have been part of a team that brought a means through which someone may have discovered a new and wonderful sense of community. In any case, do not let it go to your head.
6. It is possible that you will feel alienated, after volunteering in prison, from other people who have not shared and do not understand this experience, and from the society that produced and maintains the prisons. Share the humanness of the people you have met in prison without expecting that others will understand what you do.
7. Expect to find in prisons all the corruption and evils of society, as well as all the goodness of human nature—both magnified larger than life. Therefore, resist the temptation to:
 - a) Romanticize the prisoner. If his or her being incarcerated does not necessarily make him or her a monster, neither does it necessarily make him or her a saint. To assume otherwise is always inaccurate, usually patronizing, and sometimes dangerous.
 - b) See COs and other prison staff as obstacles to our program. Some may be supportive of AVP; others may not. All are responsible for security and have specific procedures they are required to follow. Many are good people trying to do a hard and thankless job well.

8. Go cautiously at first; awareness comes with experience. The initial prison experience might be frightening in and of itself. If you have stuck with it long enough for this to wear off, and you find yourself afraid of a given person, chances are that he or she may be dangerous to you. If you feel resentful at demands being made on you, you may well be being hustled. Trust these feelings and seek support from experienced volunteers in dealing with the situation. Learn to "trust your gut" and heed it. If after an initial exposure you find yourself fearful of the prison environment, you should not continue to go into prisons. This work is not for everyone.
9. Do not ask what crime a person has been convicted of. AVP is about reaching for the good in each person.
10. Do not under ANY circumstances bring ANY contraband into the prison, no matter how innocent the "contraband" may seem, and even if you don't agree with the rule. The introduction of ANY prohibited article by a volunteer is a misdemeanor at least, and may subject that volunteer both to criminal prosecution, if caught, and the closing down of the AVP program in that prison.
11. As for rules in general, expect to find some that seem unnecessarily silly, unjust, or oppressive but never try to simply disobey them or discuss them with prisoners. Remember that the rules are subject to change at any moment. Questioning of rules should be done through the AVP outside coordinator and the regional AVP/NY Area Council. The AVP/NY organization can protest them with the NYS Department of Correctional Services.
12. Prisons are destructive environments. It is essential, therefore, that you find a community that will offer you a safe place to vent your real feelings and to discuss your real problems, without fear of judgment or condemnation. At the same time, that community must love you enough to reach out to bring you back when you stray onto dangerous or unproductive by-paths. AVP and Friends (Quaker) Meetings can be such communities. There are people in both who understand from experience what it is to be human, the very definition of which means that one is imperfect and vulnerable in one's feelings.
13. Expect to be physically attracted some time in your prison work. Almost nobody escapes this experience, regardless of age, marital status or sexual orientation and those who have foresworn all such relationships and feelings.
14. If this happens to you, examine yourself to see whether the feeling contains one or more of the following elements:
 - a) the sexual deprivation of prison life creates an electrical charge in the very air when volunteers enter a prison—a charge that no person can fail to feel;
 - b) incarceration changes the balance of power between women and men: One of the few milieus in our society where a woman is more powerful than a man is in the prison situation where the woman is free and the man is a prisoner. As men have long known, the possession of power can be a sexual turn-on. Women have had so little experience of the phenomenon, that they may not recognize the sexual overtones of power and may mistake it for genuine attraction;

- c) incarceration makes a normal everyday relationship inaccessible. It allows both parties to fantasize but commits neither to live with the results of a relationship in the real world. The dark side of this is that you may be exploiting another person without being aware you are doing so—by projecting your fantasies and your needs on him or her that in the real world you cannot or will not follow through on.
15. If you are seized by this strong emotion, whatever it turns out to be, give yourself time and room to find out what it actually is before you act on it. Use the AVP “Queries on Relationships” (p. 10 of this handbook) to help you sort out your feelings. If you make the decision that the relationship is worth having, you **MUST** remove yourself **IMMEDIATELY** as a volunteer. And **BEFORE** you consider communicating with the person by telephone, mail or a visit.
 16. In the meantime remember that a sexually-deprived environment breeds violent jealousy and other strong emotions, and a person who chooses a prisoner for a lover could bring down the enmity of both prisoners and officers, a situation that could become dangerous for the person she or he has “chosen.”
 17. Remember also that many people have to spend long years in this deprived environment, and that it is important for them to adjust to the realities of doing time.
 18. Do not be surprised if you become overly preoccupied with an individual prisoner. Romantic attraction is only one of the roots of such preoccupation. Others are compassion, admiration for a strong personality or a valuable talent, or a sense of perceived injustice. Try to keep a balance and not invest all of your valuable energy in one person where there is so much need in others also.
 19. Under no circumstances should you give out your telephone number or personal information that might identify where you live.
 20. Prisons have proven that people do not learn very much from punishment, but more from example. What you do in prison, therefore, is more important than what you say there. A broken promise to an incarcerated person is even more painful than in normal life, and it is an act of cruelty. Even worse, it can further inhibit one’s ability to trust, and since trust is essential for integration into a community, a broken promise may further alienate the person. Therefore, do not make unrealistic promises about giving your weekends for workshops or support programs.
 21. AVP is not about “saving” others. It is about creating opportunities to practice nonviolence ourselves and share the gift of Transforming Power that was shared with us.
 22. It is important always to remember that we stand for AVP values and AVP processes based on consensus, nonviolence, truth, and the availability of transforming power to every person. These values are not likely to be found in prison guidelines for volunteers. They nevertheless are the most valuable thing we have to offer to the prison and the world, and we should never allow them to be compromised, no matter how strong the pressure is to do so.

23. Remember that as an AVP volunteer, you are a member of an organization that has programs in prisons all over the state, the country and the world. How AVP volunteers conduct themselves in one prison in New York State is communicated by prisoners and by administrators to other prisons. The reputation you establish in the prison in which you volunteer affects the reputation of AVP as a whole, and on that reputation depends the willingness of prison administrators to encourage AVP programs in the prisons for which they are responsible.
24. If we are to live nonviolently to the fullest extent we are able, we must practice. We encourage and support others in living nonviolently as we get better at actually being nonviolent ourselves. AVP/NY encourages all facilitators to take part in regular support groups and all-facilitator gatherings or workshops so that we may take on the role of participant and truly practice with our peers.

F. Queries on Relationships

Although we like to believe that everyone in AVP is equal, everyone is not equal in one very important respect: power. AVP facilitators who enter prison voluntarily have the power to walk out the door; inside facilitators and participants do not. This imbalance of power can have subtle effects, and it is important for both outside facilitators and inside facilitators to understand them.

Most workshops are powerful emotional experiences, and we rightly enjoy the feelings of love and joy that come out of having built a community based on trust and love. Those of us who continue to work together inside a prison to coordinate the AVP program there have the blessing of closer relationships, as we work together to nurture and expand our community.

AVP organizations and programs work to break down barriers of rank and hierarchy; and facilitators going into prison may want to reject the authority and power that is conferred on them by the freedom to walk away while others in their AVP community cannot. Efforts to build relationships that are blind to the inequality of power between an incarcerated person and a civilian may seduce them into blurring the boundaries established by the contract under which AVP is allowed in prisons.

When an outside facilitator or an inside facilitator finds himself or herself developing a special relationship with one person – having feelings that are stronger for that person than for others in their AVP community – it is time to question that relationship, and perhaps to seek help in sorting those feelings out.

AVP facilitators rarely enter into a special relationship with a conscious decision to exploit or harm the person; however, developing such a relationship can result in subtle or blatant harm, both to the AVP program and to the incarcerated person.

Some questions / queries:

- Would I be comfortable having my fellow facilitators know about the special relationship I have with this one particular person?
- What response would I make to any misgivings that they expressed?
- What is the potential impact on the AVP program in this prison?
- What is the potential impact on the incarcerated person, if the corrections officers were to learn of our relationship?
- As an outside facilitator, does my feeling that my situation is "special" make it seem all right for me to violate the agreements I have made with the Department of Correctional Services as a member of the AVP organization?
- Am I ready to make a choice between continuing this special relationship and facilitating AVP in the prisons?
- Are there emotional or other situations in my life right now that might impair my judgment about these issues?

Part 2: Volunteering in Community Settings

AVP guidelines are not rules or law but guides to the people who make up the AVP family. Decisions are made based on a specific case by the people involved and the AVP/NY Board Council.

Why the “multis” matter.

AVP builds on a base of respect and caring for self and others, working both in prisons and community settings. The AVP organization and workshops are strengthened if our organizational and workshop communities are multicultural and multigenerational. We practice nonviolence best in the company of diverse people. With diversity comes responsibility for multigenerational and multicultural sensitivity, which, in turn, comes from increased experience with diversity.

Differences between prison and community workshops.

We recognize that a principle difference between facilitating workshops inside prisons and facilitating workshops on the outside is that the community workshops may include people under 18 years of age and people who live with different “levels” of freedom: i.e. people who have never been incarcerated, people who have been released from prison but are now free from restraint, and people who have been released from prison but are limited by restrictions of their parole or conviction. This necessitates an awareness on the part of the facilitating team of the needs of people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and life experience.

People who return from prison.

We are honored and pleased when AVP facilitators who were active inside prison contact us when they return home. We invite them to get involved in any way they can. It serves AVP well to have members of area councils and coordinators of community programs meet with returnees to discuss their continued involvement and to explain the various roles available as participants, facilitators or support people to help with transportation, food preparation or other community needs. Facilitators who have returned from prison are encouraged to contact the AVP/NY office (800-909-8920). AVP outside coordinators are also encouraged to notify the AVP/NY office when a facilitator is released and the AVP/NY Office Administrator will connect him or her with the regional AVP/NY Area Council and/or *Landing Strip* and *The Redemption Center*. AVP participants should be gently reminded that someone who has recently returned from prison may be adjusting to changes in social norms, especially physical contact and proximity to others.

A person released from prison may have certain restrictions based on his/her conviction or parole status. It may be important to discuss it in order to be sure we do not put the individual in an uncomfortable or threatening position as a volunteer. Some may have little or no financial resources available so that transportation or registration costs may need to be covered to allow him or her to be involved. Many are also accustomed to regular diets (such as meat or coffee) that may not be available at a community workshop.

People on parole.

Each person on parole has a specific set of regulations set by his/her parole officer. Curfews may affect transportation arrangements. Someone whose conviction was alcohol or drug related may be at risk of violating parole if he or she enters a restaurant serving alcohol. If the conviction involved a person under the age of 18, the parolee may have restrictions concerning young people. Facilitators and coordinators of community workshops need to be aware of the specific restrictions. Teams that include a member on parole need to include awareness of his/her special restriction as a part of the team building. People on parole often need to present written invitations on letterhead to their parole officers so that they may attend workshops and gatherings. Parole officers should have the letters of invitation well in advance of the event.

The invitations should include the dates, times and location with meals and lodging arrangements. People on parole (or their regional AVP/NY Area Council) are encouraged to contact the AVP/NY office to request letters of invitation.

People who are young.

The primary mission of the AVP founders in Green Haven Prison was to reach out to youth. AVP is pleased and honored when young people choose to spend their time practicing nonviolence. We invite them to get involved in any way they can. It serves AVP well to have adult facilitators regularly contact youth facilitators and support them to stay involved. Young people's erratic schedules and ever-changing addresses may make them seem less reliable, yet they may be extremely reliable once they are present and are often exceptional facilitators. Young people also may have little or no financial resources available to them, so again transportation and registration costs may need to be covered to allow them to be involved, although this should not be assumed.

People who are under 18.

Parental permission should be obtained in writing (and a parental release form signed) prior to allowing any person under the age of 18 to participate in the program and/or to publish contact information in the AVP directory. A parental permission and release form is available at the AVP/NY office. Some schools may restrict touch, sharing contact information or other intimacies. The facilitators should clarify how these will be understood and handled with the administration prior to scheduling a workshop. Coordinators and adult facilitators should maintain open communication with the parents of facilitators who are under 18.

Touching during a workshop.

Some public schools, or other facilities, as well as some prisons have a "zero physical contact" policy. In an AVP workshop, hugs and other touching (certain light and livelies, in particular) are an important part of the workshop for community and trust building. AVP facilitators should carefully consider the context and setting within which physical displays of affection are shown and be clear to explain these with the administration of the institution. The setting should be public, and the context one in which a reasonable person would understand the motivation for the behavior, e.g. giving comfort, celebration, or group activities rather than personal intimacy or sexual innuendo. Facilitators of community workshops should be sensitive in particular to the vulnerability of parolees and of youth or teens and to the vulnerabilities of people who are uncomfortable, even phobic, about touch for whatever reason.

Part 3: When Things Go Wrong: Dealing with Inappropriate Behavior

A. Processes for addressing inappropriate behavior in a prison workshop or a prison support group.

In our over thirty year history, AVP/NY has witnessed serious inappropriate behavior such as flashing (exposing one's genitals), threatening language or behavior and sexual harassment. If an outside (civilian) volunteer, prison staff person or inside (prisoner) volunteer behaves inappropriately, the behavior must be addressed.

AVP seeks to build community based on openness and trust, addressing conflict directly with care and compassion. Therefore, whenever and wherever possible, it is preferred that the issue or a participant's or facilitator's behavior be addressed by the facilitation team in consultation with the inside and outside coordinators. Consequences might include suspension from participation in AVP for a period.

The following are guidelines, not rules or law but guides, to the people who make up the AVP/NY family. Decisions are made based on a specific case by the people involved, together with the AVP/NY Board Council.

1. Inappropriate behavior by a prison staffperson.

- a. Serious inappropriate behavior by a prison staffperson must be reported to the AVP outside coordinator and the prison sergeant or prison staff advisor.
- b.. You will likely be asked to make a report, so you will need to notify the facilitation team that you will need to leave the workshop for a time. You may wish to list witnesses, if there were any, after gaining their permission to do so.
- c.. Any severe incidents, even those resolved well, shall be reported to an outside body, such as the AVP/NY Board Council, the regional AVP/NY Area Council, or the group that facilitates in the prison.

2. Inappropriate behavior by an inside (prisoner) volunteer.

Serious inappropriate behavior by a prisoner shall be reported to the AVP outside coordinator and the prison administration. Reporting such incidents is protection for the victim and for others whose safety could be jeopardized by becoming involved. Failure to report an incident may jeopardize the program.

Prison administrators have suggested the following process:

1. Report the incident to the correction officers (guards) on duty. If this is uncomfortable for you, ask to speak to a sergeant or staff advisor.
2. The prison administration will likely ask that you make a report, so you will need to prepare the facilitation team for your absence. You may wish to list witnesses, if there were any, after gaining their permission to do so.

3. Any severe incidents, even those resolved well, shall be reported to an outside body, such as the AVP/NY Board Council, the regional AVP/NY Area Council, or the group that facilitates in the prison as well as the AVP outside coordinator.
4. If the inappropriate behavior was done by an inside facilitator, the incident and any action taken by the group facilitating in the prison shall be reported to AVP/NY office so that it can be relayed to another AVP outside coordinator, should that facilitator be transferred.
5. If the inappropriate behavior was done by an inside facilitator, and the AVP coordinators and the AVP/NY Board Council suspend that person from the AVP volunteer list, he or she may request that the AVP/NY Board Council reexamine his or her status at any time.

The AVP/NY Board Council recommends the following preventative measures:

1. Outside coordinators foster real team building among inside and outside facilitators that creates space for frank discussion of concerns regarding behaviors that may “invite” inappropriate behavior. If concerns are raised, the team shall discuss the team’s response should a person behave inappropriately.
2. Inside facilitators include a policy of no tolerance for disrespectful behavior in the opening talk.
3. If offensive and/or hurtful behavior occurs, AVP facilitators and area councils need to be prepared to offer support for the victim(s).
4. Outside coordinators take active responsibility for outside volunteers and carefront them about behaviors that may invite unwanted attention.
5. Outside coordinators meet with the prison administration staff advisor to find out what channels an outside volunteer might use to report an incident.

B. Processes for addressing inappropriate behavior by an AVP/NY outside (civilian) volunteer.

The Alternatives to Violence Project seeks to build community based on openness and trust by addressing conflict directly with care and compassion. Therefore, whenever and wherever possible, it is preferred that difficulties and/or inappropriate behavior in any workshop be addressed by the facilitation team and by the facilitation team in consultation with the inside and outside coordinators in the case of prison workshops.

The NYS Department of Correctional Services has a set of rules and regulations for outside volunteers. AVP/NY expects outside volunteers to respect and adhere to those rules. Questioning of rules should be done through the AVP outside coordinator and the regional AVP/NY Area Council. The term “inappropriate behavior” here refers not only to disrespecting the rules we have agreed to, but also to behavior that, based on our own inner sense, is deemed inappropriate.

Examples of inappropriate behavior in a prison setting: a female outside volunteer physically touches a male prisoner in a personalized manner such as casually holding hands, rubbing a knee, leg or arm, baring her feet or other actions insensitive to the reality that many of the men may be socially and sexually isolated for long periods of time.

Serious inappropriate behavior by a volunteer during a prison workshop shall be reported to the AVP outside coordinator and, in the case of a community workshop, to the lead facilitator, who shall report it to the AVP/NY Area Council that sponsored the workshop. Failure to report an incident in either instance may jeopardize the program.

The following are guidelines for the people who make up the AVP/NY family. Decisions are made based on a specific case by the people involved, together with the AVP/NY Board Council.

In the case of inappropriate behavior by an outside (civilian) volunteer in a prison workshop or support group:

1. The AVP outside coordinator shall meet with the volunteer to hear what happened. The coordinator shall then report to the regional AVP/NY Area Council and the AVP/NY Board Council. The volunteer shall have the opportunity to participate in both sessions.
2. The volunteer and the regional AVP/NY Area Council may meet at the request of either the volunteer or the Area Council.
3. If the incident is only reported within the AVP/NY organization, the regional AVP/NY Area Council, in consultation with the AVP/NY Board Council, shall determine appropriate action—i.e. issuing a warning, suspension or loss of AVP volunteer status. Should the AVP/NY Area Council suspend or revoke a person’s volunteer status, the Area Council shall inform the prison administration of the action taken. (If the person volunteered in other prison programs, the Area Council shall also inform the prison administration of the nature of the incident.)

4. If a volunteer has developed a special personal relationship with an individual prisoner, the AVP/NY Board Council shall be informed and an AVP clearness committee may meet with the volunteer to seek clearness together and a path forward. AVP workshops and support groups are not appropriate spaces or means to develop such relationships. Should the volunteer wish to continue the special relationship, he or she shall be asked to forfeit his or her volunteer status and his or her name shall then be removed from the AVP volunteer list that the AVP outside coordinator provides the prison. Should the volunteer no longer wish to continue the special relationship, he or she may request reinstatement as a volunteer. The regional AVP/NY Area Council, in consultation with the AVP/NY Board Council shall consider the request
5. If a volunteer has been suspended by a prison administration with justification, a letter shall be written by the AVP/NY Board Council President to the prison administration and to the NYS Department of Correctional Services Volunteer Services Coordinator, acknowledging the suspension.
6. If the AVP/NY Board Council takes action concerning a volunteer, the Board Council President shall notify the administration of the relevant prison or prisons and the NYS Department of Correctional Services.
7. If an AVP/NY volunteer has been suspended by a prison administration and believes the action to be unjust, the following process may be followed:
 - a. The AVP outside coordinator shall write to the NYS Department of Correctional Services Deputy of Programs at the relevant prison and request a meeting with him or her and with the volunteer. The coordinator may follow up the meeting with a telephone call to the Deputy of Programs.
 - b. If a meeting does not take place, or if no agreement is reached at the meeting, the AVP outside coordinator may call a special meeting of the regional AVP/NY Area Council, or, if the Area Council is not active, may request a Committee of Care comprised of members of the AVP/NY Board Council. Representatives from the Area Council or the Committee of Care shall meet with the volunteer and the AVP outside coordinator to discuss options and seek a path forward.

Note: Since AVP/NY has no legal agreement with the NYS Department of Correctional Services, the AVP organization does not have legal representation available for unresolved situations.

In the case of inappropriate behavior by a facilitator in a community workshop:

1. The lead facilitator and/or coordinator shall meet with the facilitator to hear what happened. The lead facilitator/coordinator shall then report to the regional AVP/NY Area Council and the AVP/NY Board Council. The facilitator shall have the opportunity to participate in both sessions.
2. The facilitator and the Area Council may meet at the request of either the facilitator or the Area Council.
3. The Area Council, in consultation with the AVP/NY Board Council, shall determine appropriate action—i.e. issuing, in writing and verbally, a warning, suspension or forfeiture of AVP facilitator status.
4. The facilitator may request that the Area Council reexamine his or her status at any time.

ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE PROJECT / NEW YORK

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