

# Moving from Rules to Rights and Responsibilities

WASHINGTON STATE COALITION

**WSCADV**

AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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*Hickman House*

## A little history

Hickman House staff developed the “Program Policies” (essentially, the rules) in 1988, at the inception of the program. The majority of the staff had transferred from Catherine Booth House, our emergency shelter, to Hickman House, our new transitional housing program. These staff brought both wonderful intentions to begin anew and their internalized view of shelter rules. Although they attempted to be gentle and affirming in how they conveyed the program “rules”, the message “obey or be banished” remained implicit in the style and tone of the document.

One occupational hazard of working in a domestic violence residential program is that rules and attitudes become institutionalized as staff remains in the crisis and task-oriented state necessary to respond to their workload. We rarely have time to take a step back for reflection or evaluation. This was true for us at Hickman House, and as a result, our list of rules grew.

Rules proliferated partly in response to complex and convoluted survivor issues and partly to accommodate staff who needed a clear structure in order to “know what to do” in as many situations as possible. Over the years members of the staff had intermittently discussed problems with the program policies. In these conversations, some staff had expressed concerns about being in the dual role of building trust with a survivor and enforcing rules. Some also expressed concern about the language and tone of our policies, which was punitive and somewhat discouraging of decision-making rather than supporting women to develop these skills. However, no meaningful direct actions were ever taken.

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### **Catalysts for Change**

In 2004 a combination of events happened to impel us to change the way we express the structure of our program to our clients: the staff had time for reflection on our program and practices, and two inspiring examples came our way all around the same time.

### **Reflection**

We began quarterly staff retreats with a clinical consultant. She helped us pay attention to our reactions to survivors' choices. We examined the ways we overreacted to behavior that, in any other setting, would be absolutely fine. She showed us through example how to respond non-judgmentally to the choices survivors made. She continually asked us to put ourselves in the place of the survivors in our program and had us imagine living our lives with outside observation and interference.

These retreats and consultations also allowed us to build some important skills. Our consultant helped us develop communication skills that allowed survivors to choose the course of their lives, while at the same time empowering staff to matter-of-factly communicate which choices would be incompatible with our program. For instance, saying a client is free to choose who she wants to hang out with, but if she chooses to hang out with her abuser at Hickman House, she will have to re-locate is very different than simply forbidding contact with an abuser. It affirms the programs limits in a neutral manner and affirms the client's right to make her own choices.

### **Inspiration and example**

Around this time, the King County Coalition Against Domestic Violence (KCCADV) sponsored a Transitional Housing Forum. A panel of advocates from a variety of

programs described the philosophies that guide their work. Chris Meinhold from Broadview passed out Broadview’s program rules which took the form of “Rights & Responsibilities”. This approach lined up beautifully with the skills and attitudes we were working to incorporate into our program.

The Northwest Network was another source of inspiration. At a King County Domestic Violence Directors’ meeting Connie Burk from the Network shared her agency’s core values and mission statement. Explaining the process the Network used to create this document, she said, “we were committed to doing this process and to taking as long as it took”. That was the “Aha!” moment for me! I realized our staff needed to make a real commitment to the process of rethinking rules. We needed to carve out adequate time for the task, or it would just **never** get done.

### **Getting to Work**

At the next staff meeting I broached the subject with the rest of the staff. I was met with virtually no resistance, except the expressed concern about adding work to their already busy schedules. However, we made the decision to move forward.

We identified a simple process we thought would work: We added and dedicated a half hour to our weekly staff meetings to identify our core values, revise our “Program Policies” into “Rights & Responsibilities” and write a Mission Statement reflecting our core values. We also paid homage to Connie Burke by deciding to “take as long as it took” to end up with a product we loved!

Through a combination of brainstorming, mind-mapping and discussion, we agreed on three core values: Safety, Community and Self-Determination. We looked at these values from the points of view of the staff and the survivors in our program and in terms of interactions between staff and survivors. We received survivors’ input at our monthly house-meeting.

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For example, here is what we came up with for “safety”:

*We agreed on three core values: Safety, Community and Self-Determination*

What Safety Means to Staff	What Safety Means to residents	What safety means between staff and residents
Protecting our liability	Confidentiality	Boundaries
Being free of physical danger	Being out of the abuser’s range	Respect
Boundaries	Being free of fear of staff and other residents	Feeling comfortable
Feeling able to communicate w/o intimidation	Being supported	Addressing things w/o attitude
Our “no weapons” policy	Open, transparent communication	Paying attention to whole family
Shared decision making	Children being treated well and respected	Accountability for whole family
De-escalation skills	Being understood	Clarity around rules
Control – how much do we need to have?	Having adequate resources available	Empathy – cared for and can express hard issues/feelings
Full faith and credit		
No undermining of each other		
Power sharing – no lording over		

Next we moved on to re-writing our “Program Policies” into “Rights & Responsibilities”. We began by carefully identifying which of the original rules addressed program structures or issues that we still needed to incorporate. Then we each volunteered to re-write sections of the original rules into “Rights & Responsibilities” and bring these revisions to our

weekly meetings. We discussed the tone, clarity and language in these revisions. After many weeks of doing this we arrived at a completed rough draft. In order for the final draft to be consistent in both wording and tone, one of our staff volunteered to do a last revision in a single “voice”. With that complete, it was only a matter of some minor word-smithing before we arrived at our final draft.

Finally, we began the work on our Mission Statement. We basically followed the same process defined above with some occasional consultation from a public relations specialist. We wanted our statement to be brief, clear, to implicitly incorporate our core values and to be easy to remember and repeat. We settled on this:

The Salvation Army Hickman House provides transitional housing for women with children surviving domestic violence. Our mission is to offer opportunities toward stability in a safe, supportive environment.

We placed the mission statement at the top of our “Rights & Responsibilities” and there it serves as a reminder of the program’s intentions for both staff and residents.

When the revision was complete, our Women’s Advocates passed out copies of our new “Rights & Responsibilities” at a house meeting to get feedback from our clients. They seemed genuinely pleased with the language and spirit of reciprocity. The staff is happy with our final product and we feel we met our goal of loving it.

Since we just began using the new document in February 2006, we are only just starting to see the impact on clients and staff. But we feel good about our work and the clarity it brought to us about our goals and intentions as we strive to create a positive space for families healing from domestic violence.

Mollie Curran has been The Salvation Army Hickman House program Coordinator for the past ten years. She has a Master's Degree in Social Work

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## MISSION STATEMENT

The Salvation Army Hickman House provides transitional housing for women with children surviving domestic violence. Our mission is to offer opportunities toward stability in a safe, supportive environment.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

1. You have the right to provide a safe and secure environment for yourself and your children. It is your responsibility to avoid contacting your abuser unless absolutely necessary.

Your family may have to relocate immediately if your abuser finds out the location of Hickman House, he resides in the area, or works nearby.

2. You have the right to keep your presence at Hickman House confidential. It is your responsibility to respect the confidentiality of the program location and its participants.
3. You and your children have the right to build friendships and maintain family relationships at Hickman House. You have the responsibility to balance those relationships with focus on your goals during your stay at the program.

You are responsible for selecting only three registered visitors. They must be the same three visitors throughout your stay. (Children of the visitor's family do not count toward the number of allowed registered visitors.) Select people you know well and can trust to keep the program location and its participants confidential.

Visitors are responsible for registering with staff before their first visit. They must provide a photo ID to be photocopied and sign a Visitors Agreement form that will be filed in the office.

Staff from other agencies who provide services to your family are not considered registered visitors, but we ask that they introduce themselves to the staff when they visit Hickman House.

Hickman House is a place for you and your children. You and your visitors are responsible for respecting the living space of the program participants by keeping visitors hours between 9 a.m. and 11 p.m. Visitors are welcome for short, occasional visits.

To protect the confidentiality of the program location and its participants, unregistered visitors may not be informed of the program location or have contact with program participants within a two-block radius.

Staff must pre-approve exceptions to the visitors' policy.

4. The play area is for everyone to enjoy. You have the right to let your children play outside in the play area between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 9:00 p.m. It is your responsibility to make certain that an adult supervises your children at all times and that the area is cleaned up after each use.
5. You have the right to live in a unit in good condition. It is your responsibility to keep the apartment clean and promptly notify staff when a repair is needed. Whenever possible, staff will attempt to notify you before entering your apartment.

## NONVIOLENCE POLICY

1. You and your children have the right to live free of all forms of abuse. It is your responsibility not to use any physical discipline, violence, force, or verbal abuse against any other adult or child. If you want ideas for positive discipline of your children, staff will be happy to meet with you.
2. You have the right to a fair process. If you think you are being treated unfairly at Hickman House, it is your responsibility to follow our grievance policy if you are unable to work out the problem directly with the person or people involved. You will be presented with our grievance policy during your intake. You can request a copy of it at any time, and it will always be posted on the office bulletin board.

## HEALTH AND HOUSEKEEPING

1. You and your children have the right to live in a drug-and-alcohol free environment. You are responsible for maintaining your recovery and /or sobriety. Staff will support program participants in recovery in a caring, non-judgmental, and respectful manner. To ensure a drug-free environment, all women are required to have a chemical dependency assessment upon entering the program. The assessment will be provided on site.



2. The Salvation Army doesn't allow smoking cigarettes in its buildings. If you want to smoke cigarettes, you have the responsibility to do so outside your apartment and to dispose of the cigarettes appropriately.
3. You and your children have the right to a healthy living environment at Hickman House. You have the responsibility to inform staff if you or your children have a communicable illness. Please do not attend groups or send your children to their groups if someone in your family has been ill within the past 24 hours.
4. You have the right to occupy your unit during your program participation and to retain your belongings when you leave. It is your responsibility to alert the staff if you plan on leaving the apartment unoccupied for more than five consecutive days. If this is not made known to staff, the apartment will be vacated and prepared for a new family. It is your responsibility to take your belongings with you when you move. If you do not take your belongings with you nor make arrangements with the apartment manager, Hickman House will be unable to hold your belongings.

## HICKMAN HOUSE PROGRAM

1. You have the right to build a positive housing reference while staying in the program. In order to do this and successfully transition to a permanent housing, you are responsible for consistently paying program fees by the 5<sup>th</sup> business day of the month, keeping the unit clean and in good condition, maintaining the program's property in good condition, and being respectful of neighbors. Furthermore, you are responsible for disclosing any income changes that occur during the duration of your stay. Please talk to your counselor if you have difficulty paying on time
2. You have the right to work with staff to plan strategies and goals toward independent living. It is your responsibility to attend weekly counseling sessions to work on issues and goals.
3. You and your children have a right to quiet time at night. It is your responsibility to respect the other program participants' right to quiet time at night by keeping the noise level low between 10:00 p.m. and 8 a.m.
4. You have the right to make financial decisions that support your family's needs and resources. You have the right to refuse to lend or borrow money if you are asked. You are responsible for respecting staff and program participants' resources by not asking to borrow money. Please inform your counselor if you are having difficulty meeting your family's needs and would like ideas or suggestions.