



Understanding Power and Control: Guide

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Cast and Crew

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| | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| Emma | Jean-Marie Cadby |
| Ray | Greg Muir |
| Kim | Kevin Stanton |
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| Tom | Alex Litsoudis |
| Jai | Benjamin Oakes |
| Jordan | Adam Balales |
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Disclaimer

The information provided in this guide is intended for general use only. It is not a definitive guide to the law and best practice, does not constitute formal advice, and does not take into consideration the particular circumstances and needs of your organisation.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy and completeness of this document at the date of publication. NDS cannot be held responsible and extends no warranties as to the suitability of the information in this document for any particular purpose and for actions taken by third parties.

All stories used throughout this guide and these films are fictional and are for educational purposes only.

We'll also map our learning to the Convention on the Rights of People with Disability and the PBS (Positive Behaviour Support) Capability Framework.

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Introduction

We all need to be able to recognise when power and control is being used to restrict people's lives, and know that this is unacceptable. This guide and accompanying short films have been developed as part of the Zero Tolerance Initiative to help explore restrictions on people's lives from an abuse, neglect and violence and human rights perspective.

The Zero Tolerance Initiative outlines strategies for service providers to improve prevention, early intervention and responses to abuse, neglect and violence experienced by people with disability. It urges all of us to focus on rights and target abuse to create safer, more empowering environments for people you support. Put simply, **Zero Tolerance means abuse is never OK.**

The restrictions in these films are a significant breach of a person's human rights. The use of power and control is abusive and has a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of people with disability.

About this guide

This guide accompanies the NDS Zero Tolerance Understanding power and control films. You can use this guide:

- to work through the films on your own,
- with your team; or
- if you are a supervisor – in supervision and training.

These films will assist your team's understanding of punitive restrictions and that these approaches are never acceptable. The films help to start conversations how people might be supported in different ways.

You might also find it helpful to have a copy of the [Empowerment Circle \(NDS\)](#) with you as you work through the films. The Empowerment Circle gives a way to see if a practice is good (green zone), poor (orange zone) or abusive (red zone) and how to shift those practices.

The films and guide should be used with:

- your organisation's policies and procedures.
- advice and guidelines of any other expert bodies in your state or territory.
- specific policy and legislation relevant to the state or territory you provide support in, in particular prohibited practices and authorising regulated restrictive practices.

Finding different ways to do things and speaking up

In many situations, you might feel that the way a person is being supported is not right, but not be sure about what other options are available. The reflection part of the films may give you new ideas. Share ideas and knowledge within your team, talk to your supervisor or manager and make a plan. There is a useful list of resources on page 12 under the heading **Find out more.**

About the films

These films and Guide help build staff's understanding of power and control and illustrate how these approaches are never acceptable.

We hope they help you to recognise punitive restrictions when you see or use them and start conversations about how to do things differently.

The films talk about the impact on the person, alternatives ways to support and help start conversations about how to do things differently.

Recognising Punitive Approaches

Before you begin: An Introduction to the concept of Power

At a basic level, power simply equals influence.

Each of us hold different types of power in different situations whether we realise this or not. Consciously or unconsciously, we are also part of power structures in many parts of our lives – sports club member, voter, staff member, family member are some examples.

Activity:

1. What are some examples of power?
 - Power in organisations?
 - Power between staff and people they support?
 - Positions that hold power in the community?
2. When power is used
 - Do you notice when you use power?
 - How does it feel to have power over others?
 - How does it feel when others have power over you?

Power control is where a person uses their position of power or authority to control another person's behaviour or make them do something. Examples of power control include:

- being told not to move or to speak
- being told to sit down
- treating adults like they are children.

Power and control can be:

| Overt and Deliberate | Subtle or Accidental |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • patronising or mocking • intimidating or bullying • creating fear through words and actions (example: ‘the look’) • abusing authority • manipulating through coercion or rewards • over-riding decisions as ‘the expert’ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not listening to someone or taking them seriously • ignoring choices • prioritising your own values • having low expectations • speaking about or for a person in public |

Here are some common ways people can exert power and control in a subtle or accidental way over people they support.

Personal values – recognising when and how we impose our own values on the people we support.

Making choices for people instead of providing the support they need to make their own choices.

Having **low expectations** of what people can achieve.

Communication – disempowering people through the way we talk to and about people with disability.

Film – Power control

“Hands on your lap, everyone”
“We are not kindergarten people.”

In this scenario we see

Tom has made souvlaki for his new housemates. Everyone sits down to eat at the table. Tom is about to start eating but Emma stops him. Jordan explains that they must wait until everyone is ready to start eating. Lesley tells everyone to put their hands in their laps. Tom is surprised at the way everyone is being treated but Emma is used to it.



“Dinner time”

Things to talk about

- How do you feel watching this film?
- Who do you think makes the rules in this house?
- Have you even seen any power imbalances like this in your job? How did you feel? What did you do?
- How do you support people to choose how they want their lives to be?
- Where do these practices sit on the Empowerment Circle: good, poor, or abusive?
- If you were a new worker in this home, how would you feel? What would you do? What would help you?

Reflection Activity:

Imposing your values on clients means that you attempt to exert direct influence over their beliefs, feelings, judgments, attitudes, and behaviors. Strategies to avoid this tendency include checking your values and becoming aware of people you are supporting beliefs and values. Be honest with yourself about your own values and biases

1. What values do you bring to your work?
2. Why do you work in the disability field?
3. What is your aim in supporting people with disability?

Personal values and experiences can shape people’s views on what constitutes abuse. When you make decisions based on your own values you are exerting power over the person you are supporting.

When your values conflict with the person you are supporting, simply listen and acknowledge what the person says without judgment or bias. This neutral and respectful attitude can help keep your values in check.

Film - Consequence control

“Do you want me to call your brother and tell him that you can’t go to the footy tomorrow?”

“It’s up to you. Your choice.”



“Out for lunch”

Consequence control is when someone uses warnings, threats, or intimidation to make someone do what they want them to do.

Consequence control often involves threats about things, people or activities that are important to the person.

Examples include:

- personal threats involving relationships or possessions
- coercion or bribery
- punishment or implication of punishment.

In this scenario we see

Ray and Lesley are having lunch at a café. Lesley tells Ray that they need to leave so she can finish her shift on time. Ray hasn’t finished his meal and doesn’t want to leave. Lesley asks Ray if he wants her to call his brother and cancel their planned day at the football. Ray thinks about this and reluctantly agrees to leave.

Things to talk about

- Lesley says “It’s up to you. Your choice.” Do you think this is true?
- How else might you Lesley have handled this situation?
- Have you seen examples of this kind of control in your work?
- Where do these practices sit on the Empowerment Circle: good, poor, or abusive?
- What would you do if you saw an exchange like this between a colleague and someone you support? What would help you?
- How would you support Ray if he asked you about the lunch?

Activity:

When you say no, you are adding to the power imbalance. Wherever power balances exist people are: Disempowered, disrespected and at higher risk of abuse.

1. How do you empower the people you support?
2. How do you disempower the people you support?

Reflection Activity:

It is important to recognise times when you are exercising power and control in your role as a support worker.

- What is happening for you?
- How does it feel?
- What is happening for the person?
- How do they feel?
- What can you do differently to ensure choice and control for the people you support?

Impact of restrictions on people's lives

All restrictions have impact. In your everyday work it is important to recognise any restrictions on people's lives:

- be aware of the impact on the person
- find out why a restriction is in place
- know if is approved and part of a plan?
- follow reporting procedures of your organisation
- explore what better, less restrictive approaches
- use positive strategies everyday – these reduce the use of restrictive practices and improve quality of life
- learn about why some behaviours happen (function) to help in your work
- think about what can be done differently.

Some of the impacts of restrictions for the person

- negative effects on how the person is perceived
- impacts on relationships with others
- creates negativity and mistrust between person and support worker
- puts focus on behaviours instead of the person
- may ignore serious underlying issues
- affects health and life expectancy
- affects confidence
- affects ability to learn new skills
- reinforces dependency on staff.

Some of the impacts on others when restrictions are used

- restrictions on one person can impact on how other people feel, act, and respond to situations
- flow on restrictions to rights and personal freedom
- distressing to watch

- vicarious trauma
- learned behaviours
- compliance, anxiety and fear
- institutionalisation
- can affect relationships with others if they are part of a consequence.

Some of the impact on staff and culture

- see people through a behaviour lens
- focus on 'monitoring' people rather than building relationships
- creates a 'fearful' environment
- decrease in motivation
- models poor culture for new staff
- sets a precedent for how to support a person with a disability that is acceptable.

Thank you for watching the Recognising Punitive Approaches films and working through this guide.

We hope that you found it useful in being able to identify when people you work with are restricted and in finding other ways to support people with disability.

Find out more

Find out more about upholding human rights, preventing abuse, and recognising restrictive practices in the [Zero Tolerance a collection of resources](#).

You may find these Zero Tolerance resources help identify and discuss restrictions on people's rights:

- [Understanding Abuse- Human Rights and You](#) (eLearning program)
- [Empowerment Circle](#)
- [Understanding Abuse Learning Bites](#): 3–5-minute videos addressing eight life areas in the Empowerment Circle Foundations
- [Regulated Restrictive Practice Guide](#) - the guide explains what a restrictive practice is and sets out information on the five types of regulated restrictive practices. Source: The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

See your Jurisdiction for information about authorisation

For information about authorisation for regulated restrictive practices and other practices your jurisdiction oversees please see your state or territory's legislative framework for your state or territory.

For discussion: Practices proposed to be prohibited

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission has a function of assisting states and territories to develop a regulatory framework for restrictive practices. An important step in developing that framework is national agreement on a list of restrictive practices that should be prohibited by states and territories. States and territories are in the process of introducing changes that bring their respective authorisation processes into alignment with these shared principles. Some of the practices listed are already prohibited in some jurisdictions.

This paper outlines practices proposed to be prohibited and include

8 Specific forms of physical restraint

6 Punitive approaches

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission: [Practices proposed to be prohibited](#)

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