

WEBINAR SUPPLEMENT: 'WAYS TO RESPOND TO QUESTIONS ABOUT MAID'

BACK TO BASICS: The PSW's Role

MAID does not change how you work or the purpose of your role, which is to provide holistic, compassionate, non-judgmental care no matter what your personal beliefs are about a person's religion, culture, lifestyle or their personal decision about MAID.

Although MAID is legal in Canada, it can still generate strong opinions and challenge strongly held beliefs. This means that it is more important than ever that as a PSW, you engage with the individuals and families in your care from a neutral place. This is possible when you:

1. Become aware of your personal baggage and then set it aside as you work
2. Understand that a professional and ethical practice involves maintaining clear personal and professional boundaries
3. Use a strategy that helps you pause before offering advice or sharing an opinion that may be inappropriate or beyond your scope of practice.

There is never a more important time to be clear about what the PSW's role is than when people in your care are making a decision as significant as the one they may make about MAID. Your skills in relationship building, listening without judgement, witnessing without taking sides, empowering instead of fostering dependence, and remaining supportive but neutral, even in the face of family conflict and turmoil, are the foundations of a professional and ethical practice.

By listening, responding and observing without judgement, the PSW's role is to help create a place where every person in their care feels safe and worthy of honour and respect.

1. Baggage

Baggage includes the beliefs, opinions, and values that we all carry with us as we live our lives. These beliefs and opinions create our world view and inform how we approach both life and death. Becoming aware of this baggage is the first step in being able to set it aside when you work with people who have a different set of beliefs about suffering, quality of life, and an individual's right to choose how they die, all of which are related to MAID.

When words like 'you're supposed to', 'you should', 'you shouldn't', 'you must', 'you can't', 'I would', or 'I wouldn't' are used to talk about MAID, it means that a boundary has been crossed in an attempt to influence someone to change their mind regardless of whether or not that feels right to them.

By keeping your personal feelings and beliefs about MAID separate from your work, you protect the right of people in your care to make important decisions without the added burden of trying to carry your baggage as well as their own.

2. Boundaries

In this context, it's useful to think of boundaries as the guardrails that help us keep our baggage separate from the people we are caring for, allowing us to feel deeply, while still thinking clearly and acting wisely. Whether you are responding to a question about MAID, discussing a person's request for MAID or providing care to someone who is scheduled to receive MAID, boundaries allow you to maintain enough separation to focus on the needs and wishes of the person and family, rather than on your own needs and wishes.

When you bring a deep respect for boundaries to your work, you can maintain your own beliefs about many issues and still provide compassionate, non judgmental companionship, care and support that protect and respect the autonomy and rights of each person in your care.

3. VERS: Validate, Explore, Respond, and Share *

VERS is a useful strategy for responding to challenging questions or engaging in challenging conversations that takes the focus off of us and our attempts to come up with an answer or an opinion. Instead, VERS is about pausing long enough to acknowledge the question or concern, clarifying what the underlying issues are, responding without overstepping personal boundaries or scope of practice and then sharing useful information with the team that can make it so much easier for the appropriate member of the team to deal with the question or concern accurately and effectively.

An underlying premise of VERS is that we do not have to answer every question we are asked. It's when we feel pressured to come up with an answer that we are more likely to say too much, to say something that is inaccurate or beyond our scope of practice, or to share our own beliefs and opinions inappropriately, perhaps in an attempt to influence the person asking the question.

Finally, proactively seek out your organisation's policies and procedures as they relate to your role as a PSW, particularly related to any issues or concerns you have regarding MAID. Then focus on what you do best when you bring all of your skills in compassionate caring to your work, strengthened by ever-increasing self awareness, clear boundaries and an appreciation of your value in gathering important information for the team.

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*For more information on VERS go to lifeanddeathmatters.ca