

## **Queries on Relationships For use with AVP Facilitators**

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 of trust and love. Those of us who continue to work together inside a prison to coordinate the AVP program there have the blessing of having our relationship grow closer, as we work together to nurture and expand our community. Sometimes special relationships develop.

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 inequity 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 seek help in sorting those feelings out. Taking a time-out (break) from facilitation at that particular institution is appropriate and may be necessary.

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 DOCS as a member of the AVP organization?
- Is there any emotional turmoil in my life right now that might impair my judgment about these issues?