DELEGATE FIELD GUIDE • OPPA AGM

Beyond the Behaviour

A trauma-informed representation toolkit | Supporting the member

THE CENTRAL IDEA

Behaviour is information, not a diagnosis. Anger, repetition, withdrawal, distrust or inconsistent recall may reflect stress or trauma - or something else. Stay curious, verify facts and avoid assuming you know the cause.

Five commitments in every difficult conversation

SAFETY	Reduce unnecessary threat. Speak calmly; ask what would help the person engage.
TRUST	Be clear about your role, what you know, what you do not know and when you will follow up.
CHOICE	Explain genuine options without promising control over decisions the member cannot make.
COLLABORATION	Work with the member on next steps; do not simply direct them.
EMPOWERMENT	Make sure they understand the process and can participate in decisions affecting them.

Language that keeps the conversation open

INSTEAD OF	TRY
“Calm down.”	“I can hear how upsetting this is.”
“I already explained that.”	“Let’s go through the next step together.”
“That’s just the process.”	“Here’s what happens next, and what choices you have.”
“There’s nothing I can do.”	“Here’s what I can help with - and what I can’t change.”

Remember: Validation is not agreement. Understanding does not excuse misconduct. Accountability, evidence, deadlines and respectful boundaries still matter.

QUESTIONS OR FOLLOW-UP

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Support without carrying everything

Practical steps, escalation and representative well-being

A simple structure for a difficult member conversation

1. CONNECT Acknowledge the concern without endorsing allegations. “I can hear this has been extremely difficult.”
2. CLARIFY Ask what is most urgent today. Separate what is known from what is assumed.
3. EXPLAIN Describe your role, relevant limits, immediate deadlines and the next one or two steps.
4. CHECK Ask what the member understood; offer a short written recap where appropriate.
5. FOLLOW THROUGH Do what you promised. If the plan changes, tell them promptly.

Know when representation is not enough

You are an advocate and colleague, not a therapist. Do not promise absolute confidentiality or an outcome you cannot control. Explain applicable confidentiality limits, consult appropriate supports, and follow OPPA-approved procedures for referrals, documentation and escalation.

When someone may be unsafe

Take concerning statements seriously. If a member says “I can’t do this anymore,” calmly ask directly whether they are thinking about suicide or harming themselves. Do not assume either safety or imminent danger from an ambiguous statement alone. If there is immediate danger or a credible imminent threat, contact 911 and follow the organization’s emergency procedures. Do not leave a person in immediate danger without arranging appropriate assistance. In Canada, call or text 988 for suicide crisis support. A representative should not attempt a clinical risk assessment or manage a crisis alone.

Who looks after the representative?

Recognize the load. Notice irritability, cynicism, intrusive thoughts, sleep changes or difficulty switching off. These signs are not diagnoses, but they may indicate that support is needed.

Share the load appropriately. Debrief through authorized channels, seek peer or professional support and respect member privacy.

Put the load down. Set reasonable availability limits, take breaks and hand off matters when necessary. Supporting a member does not mean becoming responsible for their recovery.

LOOK BENEATH THE BEHAVIOUR • MAKE THE PROCESS MORE HUMAN • SUPPORT WITHOUT CARRYING EVERYTHING

Educational resource for association representatives; not clinical training, legal advice or a substitute for OPPA policies and emergency protocols.

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