

Civil Rights and Responsibilities

Course Transcript

Introduction

Chapter 1

[On screen: Two former VISTA members, Wanda and Nate.]

WANDA: Hi, I'm Wanda.

NATE: And I'm Nate.

Chapter 2

[On screen: Wanda.]

WANDA: I don't know about you, but before I started my year of service, I felt a bit overwhelmed. So many forms. So many policies. My temptation was to skip through the information. But then something happened that made me realize how important it was to know my rights and responsibilities as a VISTA.

Chapter 3

[On screen: Nate.]

NATE: When I started, I thought I understood my civil rights and responsibilities. But after I faced a harassment situation at my site, I realized that the law protects us as VISTAs.

Chapter 4

[On screen: Nate and Wanda.]

WANDA: Click each of us to find out more about why we're here. Then click Next.

WANDA: I was a VISTA for two years in Minnesota. A few months into my service, another VISTA had some problems at her site. If I had known more about our rights, I might've been able to keep her from quitting. I'm here today because I don't want you to **feel as lost as I did**.

NATE: I was a VISTA for a year in Texas. When a co-worker started harassing me, I didn't recognize the signs right away. The experience almost ruined my entire year. I want to make sure you know how to **get the protection you're entitled to**.

Chapter 5

[On screen: Wanda.]

WANDA: As a VISTA, you are protected by VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service from being subjected to discrimination or harassment.

You are not an employee when you serve as a VISTA. Instead, you are a federally-funded national service participant. This means your protections and expectations may differ from previous work and volunteer experiences.

In addition to these protections, you should not harass or discriminate against others.

Chapter 6

[On screen: Nate and Wanda.]

NATE: This course will explain your civil rights and responsibilities as a VISTA. By the end of it you'll be able to:

- Recognize and respond to harassment and discrimination
- Know who to go to if you experience or witness discrimination or harassment
- Form a list of additional questions to bring to and discuss at your Pre-Service Orientation

The course has four sections, and should take you about 30 minutes to complete.

Discrimination: A Question of Roles

Chapter 1

[On screen: Wanda.]

WANDA: In this scenario you will see how Sun Hee, a VISTA at a community-based organization, handled a situation with a colleague that she thought was discrimination. Click Play to begin.

Chapter 2

WANDA: Sun Hee is a VISTA at Strong Families, a community-based organization with a program that supports families of prisoners. At a weekly meeting, the project coordinator, Lorenzo, has just announced that they'll be expanding the program to help prisoners with re-entry.

As a result, he'll be assigning some new tasks to staff and VISTAs. Click Next to see what happens.

Chapter 3

[On screen: A staff meeting. Lorenzo stands in front of two women and two men who are listening to him.]

LORENZO: This is a really exciting opportunity. We'll be developing new partnerships with housing and employment agencies to facilitate the re-entry process.

SUN HEE (thought): Terrific! This is exactly what I've been saying we need to do.

LORENZO: We'll start by conducting a needs analysis, which will involve interviewing current prisoners, analyzing data, and creating a database.

LORENZO: Who's interested in this?

[On screen: All four people raise their hands.]

LORENZO: Great, how about ...Lewis and ...Marcus.

SUN HEE (thought): Marcus always gets the best projects.

Chapter 4

[On screen: Sun Hee talks to Lorenzo after the meeting.]

SUN HEE: Lorenzo, do you think I could help with the interviews?

LORENZO: Sorry, I don't think so. We'll definitely need your writing skills, though.

SUN HEE: I don't know if you knew this, but I was a reporter for my community newspaper. I have a lot of experience interviewing.

LORENZO (said with finality): I know you do, but I'm thinking about your safety.

SUN HEE (half to herself): But I'd be with a guard, wouldn't I?

Chapter 5

[On screen: Sun Hee talks to coworkers Janice and Marcus.]

SUN HEE: I can't believe he didn't assign me to that project.

JANICE: That's typical Lorenzo.

MARCUS: Yeah. Haven't you ever noticed? Only men work on projects with prisoners, and only women work on projects with mothers and children.

[On screen: Sun Hee, upset.]

SUN HEE: But he can't do that. It's discrimination!

Chapter 6

[On screen: Wanda.]

WANDA: Before we go any further, let's take a minute to look at the laws about discrimination.

Chapter 7

As a VISTA member, a number of federal laws protect your civil rights. These laws prohibit discrimination in programs and activities where you serve. The laws prohibit discrimination based on:

- Race, color, or national origin;
- Sex or gender;
- Disability;
- Age;
- Religion;
- Political affiliation;

- Gender identity and expression; or
- Sexual orientation.

Chapter 8

The main thing to remember is that illegal discrimination is treatment that is different **because of** a difference in race, sex, national origin, age, religion, political affiliation or sexual orientation. Different treatment, **combined with** a difference, is **not** illegal discrimination.

Chapter 9

[On screen: Quiz with four answer choices.]

WANDA: Now that you know the laws about discrimination for VISTAs, what do you think? Is Lorenzo discriminating against Sun Hee? Read the explanations below and click the answer that best matches your interpretation of the situation at Strong Families.

- A) It's a coincidence that both of Lorenzo's choices are male. Therefore, this is not discrimination.

WANDA: This could be a coincidence, but Janice and Marcus don't seem to think so. To really know, Sun Hee would have to find out what motivated Lorenzo's decision. Remember: any treatment that is different because of a difference is discrimination. Try again.

- B) This is the first time this has happened. Therefore, this is not discrimination.

WANDA: This may be the first time Sun Hee has felt discriminated against by Lorenzo, but that doesn't mean it's not discrimination. Treating someone differently because of certain differences is discrimination, even if it only happens once. Try again.

- C) [Correct answer] Lorenzo appears to have made his choice based on Sun Hee's gender. Therefore, this could be discrimination.

WANDA: It seems that Lorenzo made his choice based on gender. Treating someone differently because of certain differences is discrimination. Based on what happened when Sun Hee talked to Lorenzo, and what her co-workers told her about Lorenzo, it seems that Lorenzo is treating Sun Hee differently because she is female. To really know, you'd have to find out what motivated his decision, but at this point, this seems like discrimination.

- D) Lorenzo really thought that it wouldn't be a good idea for a woman to work with prisoners. Therefore, this is not discrimination.

WANDA: I can see why you might want to give Lorenzo the benefit of the doubt, but treating someone differently because of certain differences is discrimination, even if the person has a good reason for it. Try again.

Chapter 10

WANDA: Sun Hee clearly has the background, desire, and time to work on the needs assessment. Because Lorenzo's only reason for assigning Marcus and Lewis to the job is that he's "worried about Sun Hee's safety," he appears to be assigning—or not assigning—roles based on gender.

Chapter 11

[On screen: Quiz with four answer choices.]

WANDA: What should Sun Hee do in this situation? Read the explanations below and click the best answer.

A) [Correct answer] Go directly to Lorenzo.

WANDA: Yes. As long as Sun Hee feels safe and comfortable talking with Lorenzo, her next step is to let him know how his decision has affected her. Click Next to see what happens when Sun Hee talks to Lorenzo.

B) Accept that that's the way things are in this office.

WANDA: Try again. As a VISTA, Sun Hee has a right not to be discriminated against, as well as a responsibility not to discriminate against others. VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service protect Sun Hee's rights, and she shouldn't let an uncomfortable situation continue.

C) Talk to her VISTA supervisor about the situation.

WANDA: Yes, but if Sun Hee feels safe and comfortable, there is someone else she could talk to before she goes to her supervisor. Try again.

D) Contact the state office.

WANDA: Try again. This is definitely an option but there's something Sun Hee needs to do before she goes to the state office.

Chapter 12

[On screen: Sun Hee talking to Lorenzo.]

SUN HEE: Lorenzo, I thought a lot about yesterday's meeting. I feel that by only having Marcus and Lewis do the interviews you're treating me differently than the men on the team. I'm as qualified, if not more, than both of them.

LORENZO (thought): Did I really do that?

SUN HEE: I think I should be given the opportunity to participate in the interviews.

LORENZO: I'm really glad you came to talk to me. I think it's important that everyone here gets equal treatment.

SUN HEE: I know other women who have worked in male correctional facilities.

LORENZO: I could tell you were disappointed yesterday, but I was thinking of your safety. Now that you frame it that way, I see your point.

Chapter 13

[On screen: Wanda.]

WANDA: After their meeting, Lorenzo reassigned roles in the project and Sun Hee was able to do the interviews.

WANDA: As you've seen, Sun Hee was able to solve this situation by speaking directly with Lorenzo. But it's not always that easy. If you suspect you are being discriminated against and don't feel comfortable talking to the person directly or don't receive a satisfactory response, you have other options. You can:

- Go to your supervisor. Reporting the incident is an important first step toward getting protection from VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service.
- If that's not possible or doesn't work, contact your state office.
- Finally, you can contact the Corporation's Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness in Washington, D.C.

Chapter 14

WANDA: Good work. You've successfully completed the discrimination section.

Harassment: An Uncomfortable Situation

Chapter 1

[On screen: Nate.]

NATE: In this scenario, you will see how Matt, a VISTA, handled a situation with a colleague that he thought was harassment. Click Play to begin.

Chapter 2

NATE: Matt is a VISTA at City Health Initiative, a program that helps low-income families access healthcare. He enjoyed a good working relationship with the program staff until one day, when he approached his co-worker Cindy's desk and found . . . Click Next to see what happens.

Chapter 3

[On screen: Cindy sits at a desk in an office cubicle that is decorated with pictures of half-dressed men. Matt stands next to the cubicle and looks in.]

[On screen: Matt hands a sheet of a paper to Cindy.]

MATT: Hi, Cindy. Here's the spreadsheet you needed.

CINDY: Cool. You know, that shirt really shows off your abs. Have you been working out?

MATT: What? Uh, I guess I'm going to the gym more lately.

[On screen: Matt looking uncomfortable.]

MATT (thought): Why am I talking about this with her?

[On screen: Cindy.]

CINDY: Well, you're turning into quite a beefcake, if you ask me. I've been working out too. What do you think?

MATT: I . . . need to get going.

CINDY: Hey, maybe we could go to the gym together?

MATT: I'm going to be late for that team meeting.

[On screen: Matt walking away from Cindy's cubicle.]

MATT (thought): She's never done that before. That freaked me out; I need to stay away from her. And . . . was I just harassed?

Chapter 4

[On screen: Nate.]

NATE: Clearly, Matt feels uncomfortable, but was this harassment? Before we go any further, let's take a look at what we mean by harassment.

NATE: Verbal and non-verbal communication relating to an individual's gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, or any other "non-merit basis" constitutes harassment. Behavior is harassment when it is severe and/or pervasive and interferes with a VISTA's performance, creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive service environment.

Harassment includes but isn't limited to:

- Explicit or implicit demands for sexual favors
- Pressure for one's company
- Unwelcome persistent letters, phone calls, emails or other media
- Distribution or display of offensive material
- Offensive looks, gestures; physical encroachment, or threatening behavior

Chapter 5

[On screen: Quiz with four answer choices.]

NATE: So now that you know the definition of harassment, what do you think? Was Cindy harassing Matt? Read the explanations below and click the answer that best matches your interpretation of what happened.

- A) Cindy's behavior was sexually suggestive and unwelcomed. Therefore, this is harassment.

NATE: Matt was uncomfortable with the way Cindy was acting and with the pictures she displayed, but she didn't demand anything from him and this is the first time this has happened. So, her behavior is not yet "severe and/or pervasive" enough to be considered harassment. Try again.

- B) Cindy's unsolicited flirtation and invitation to the gym were inappropriate. Therefore, this is harassment.

NATE: Cindy's behavior probably does not qualify as "severe" right now. However, if Matt reports her and she continues these invitations and advances, this could become harassment. Try again.

- C) Cindy's behavior and images in her cubicle intimidated Matt and made him leave quickly. Therefore, this is harassment.

NATE: Matt seemed uncomfortable, but not necessarily intimidated by Cindy. This is also the first time this has happened. So far, Cindy's behavior is not "severe and/or pervasive," so it is not yet harassment. Try again.

- D) [Correct answer] Cindy may be annoying, but her behavior did not seem "severe and/or pervasive." Therefore, this is not harassment.

NATE: Yes. Cindy's behavior must be "severe and/or pervasive" to be considered harassment.

Chapter 6

NATE: To be considered harassment, words and actions must be severe and/or pervasive and create a hostile or intimidating environment that prevents VISTAs from serving effectively. In this case, Matt seems put off and puzzled by Cindy's behavior, but because this is the first time she acted this way, it is not yet harassment. If Cindy is put on notice—told she's making Matt uncomfortable and asked to stop—and she continues the behavior, it's harassment.

Chapter 7

[On screen: Quiz with four answer choices.]

NATE: What should Matt do in this situation? Read the explanations below and click the best answer.

- A) Talk directly to Cindy.

NATE: Matt could talk to Cindy directly and in many cases this would be the first option. But because Matt may not feel comfortable going to her directly, there is someone else he could turn to first. Try again.

- B) Contact the state office.

NATE: Try again. This is definitely an option but there's something Matt needs to do before he goes to the state office.

C) [Correct answer] Talk to his VISTA supervisor about the situation.

NATE: Yes. Because Matt doesn't feel comfortable talking to Cindy, his VISTA supervisor is his first point of contact. Click Next to see what happens when Matt tells his supervisor, Helen, about the situation.

D) Avoid working with Cindy and make sure he is never alone with her.

NATE: Try again. As a VISTA, Matt has the right not to be harassed, as well as a responsibility not to harass others. VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service protect Matt's rights, and he shouldn't let an uncomfortable situation continue.

Chapter 8

[On screen: Matt talks to his VISTA supervisor, Helen.]

MATT: So, I'm really not sure I want to work with her anymore. She makes me . . . uncomfortable.

HELEN: I'll talk to Cindy. She needs to understand this is unacceptable behavior.

Chapter 9

[On screen: Helen talks to Cindy; Cindy takes down the pinups.]

NATE: Helen told Cindy her behavior was making Matt uncomfortable. She asked her to curb her behavior and to remove the pin-ups. If Cindy doesn't comply, her behavior will become harassment.

Chapter 10

NATE: As you've seen, although Cindy's behavior made Matt uncomfortable, it wasn't harassment.

The best thing to do in a situation like this is talk to the person directly. However, if you do not feel safe or comfortable doing so, or if the person does not give you a satisfactory response, you have other options.

- As Matt did, you could talk to your VISTA supervisor. Reporting the incident is an important first step toward getting protection from VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service.
- If that's not possible or doesn't work, contact your state office.
- Finally, you can contact the Corporation's Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness in Washington, D.C.

Chapter 11

NATE: Good work. You've successfully completed the harassment section.

A Matter of Appearances

Chapter 1

[On screen: Wanda.]

WANDA: Let's apply what you've learned about discrimination and harassment to another scenario. This time we are going to look at a group of VISTAs who serve together and see how one of them, Robert, responds to a situation that doesn't seem right. Click Play to begin.

Chapter 2

[On screen: Nate.]

NATE: Mary supervises four VISTAs at Uplifting Children. One day, after a meeting, three community members approach Mary with concerns about her new VISTAs. Click Next to see what happens.

Chapter 3

[On screen: Two women and one man approach VISTA supervisor Mary at a community meeting.]

MARY: What's on your mind?

COMMUNITY MEMBER 1: It's about the VISTAs' appearances.

MARY: Can you be a little more specific please?

COMMUNITY MEMBER 1: Well, we don't expect them to wear suits and ties, but—

[On screen: Close-up of the two women and one man at the meeting.]

COMMUNITY MEMBER 2 (said with distaste): The long hair, the jewelry...

COMMUNITY MEMBER 3: The funky clothes and tattoos. We don't like the example they're setting for our youth.

MARY: I see. Thanks for sharing your concerns with me. I will talk to them about it.

Chapter 4

[On screen: Mary leading a meeting with four VISTAs, who only have the backs of their heads visible.]

MARY: Before you go, there's one more thing. Some people from the community have told me they're uncomfortable with the way some of you look.

VISTA 1 (thought): How we look doesn't affect how we work. No big deal though, I guess.

VISTA 2 (thought): Am I going to have to get a suit?

MARY: This isn't meant for anyone in particular, but if you could try to look a little more professional when you're out and about, that might help. You know, put on a nice shirt or blouse, get a shave or a haircut, and wear jewelry that's a little more discreet.

VISTA 3 (thought): I wonder what time Goodwill closes.

VISTA 4 ROBERT (thought): Uh oh. This may be a problem. My long hair is part of who I am.

Chapter 5

[On screen: Quiz with four answer choices.]

NATE: So what do you think? Are the VISTAs being harassed or discriminated against? Read the explanations below and click the answer that best matches your interpretation of what happened.

- A) The community members' prejudices are making it difficult or uncomfortable for the VISTAs to do their work. Therefore, this is harassment.

NATE: Not really. The community members may be uncomfortable around the VISTAs because of the way they dress, but there's no evidence that they are subjecting the VISTAs to abuse or getting in the way of their work. Therefore, it's too early to call this behavior harassment. Try again.

- B) The community members are making assumptions about the VISTAs because they dress differently. Therefore, this is discrimination.

WANDA: Not really. The community members are certainly making judgments, but voicing prejudice is not the same as acting out of prejudice, which can cross the line into discrimination. With no evidence the community members have treated the VISTAs differently based on their feelings, it's too early to call this behavior discrimination. Try again.

- C) [Correct answer] The community members aren't treating the VISTAs differently or subjecting the VISTAs to unwelcome communications because of the way they dress. Therefore, this is not discrimination or harassment.

NATE: Yes. This is the best choice based on what we know so far. Nobody likes to be judged on how they look or dress. But unless the community members act against the VISTAs based on their assumptions or prejudices, it's probably not harassment or discrimination.

- D) As their supervisor, Mary should have stood up for the VISTAs. Instead she asked them to change their appearance. Therefore, this is discrimination.

WANDA: Not really. As a supervisor, Mary's job is to facilitate a positive relationship between the VISTAs and the community and to provide feedback to the VISTAs when necessary. She shared the community members' concerns, but didn't single anyone out for different treatment or abuse, so this is not discrimination. Try again.

Chapter 6

WANDA: Communities and organizations have varying ideas about dress and appearance.

NATE: These assumptions, beliefs and policies are not in and of themselves harassment or discrimination.

WANDA: But illegal harassment or discrimination occurs when individuals are **single out** and subjected to abuse and/or different treatment based on dress or appearance related to their **race, national origin, or religion**.

NATE: The other VISTAs felt fine about adjusting their appearances, but for Robert, his long hair is part of his cultural identity. Click Next to consider how Robert should approach this situation.

Chapter 7

[On screen: Quiz with four answer choices.]

NATE: Read the choices below and click the best answer.

- A) Ignore the request.

NATE: Try again. Dismissing the request with no discussion or action is disrespectful to both Mary and the community members. If long hair is part of his cultural identity, he should speak up.

- B) Cut his hair. He can grow it out again when his VISTA year is over.

WANDA: Try again. Robert feels strongly about his appearance, and his long hair doesn't seem to create a safety hazard or prevent him from doing his work effectively. There's a better way for him to handle this situation.

- C) Track down the community members and explain to them why he thinks he should be able to make choices about his appearances.

NATE: Try again. Although talking to the person directly is often the first choice, Robert doesn't know who in the community said what, so speaking directly to the community members may not be productive. There's someone else Robert can talk to first.

- D) [Correct answer] No matter why Robert wears his hair long, he should talk to his supervisor about how to preserve his identity and address the community's concerns.

WANDA: Yes. As a VISTA, it's important for Robert to consider how he fits into his community. He doesn't have to change who he is, but it could be worth it to make some adjustments to help people relate to him. Click Next to see what happens when Robert mentions his concerns to his supervisor.

Chapter 8

[On screen: Mary talks to Robert.]

MARY: I'm so glad you came to me, Robert. It's clear you feel strongly that your appearance is part of your cultural identity.

ROBERT: It is. But I also don't want them to think I'm being disrespectful.

MARY: I know you don't. Do you think there's any middle ground we could find here?

Chapter 9

[On screen: Robert, with his long hair tied back, talks to the three community members that appeared at the beginning.]

NATE: Robert began tying his hair back when he met with the community. At first, he worried that this change wouldn't be enough, but the community members appreciated that their concerns were taken seriously. As a result, they were all able to work better together.

Chapter 10

WANDA: As you've seen, this situation was not harassment or discrimination. But if left unchecked, it could have affected Robert's ability to work with the community and have a successful VISTA year.

If you experience a situation that could be discrimination or harassment, or simply affects your ability to complete your work, you should try to speak directly to the person, if you feel safe and comfortable. If you don't, or if they don't respond favorably:

- Go to your VISTA supervisor. Reporting the incident is an important first step toward getting protection from VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service.
- If speaking to your supervisor doesn't work or isn't possible, contact your state office.
- Finally, you can contact the Corporation's Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness in Washington, D.C.

Chapter 11

NATE: Good work. You've successfully completed this scenario.

David's Dilemma

Chapter 1

[On screen: Nate and Wanda.]

NATE: In the previous scenarios, VISTAs encountered situations that appeared to be harassment or discrimination. While it's important that VISTAs understand their civil rights and responsibilities, entering new communities can raise complex issues that don't always have clear solutions. In this scenario, we'll explore another kind of situation—one that involves making a difficult decision ...

WANDA: David is a first-year VISTA at Sheltering Pines, a nonprofit that provides services to seniors. For the last three months he's been helping coordinate logistics for a volunteer recognition dinner dance. Now the party he's been planning creates a dilemma.

Chapter 2

[On screen: Informal meeting of program staff and volunteers, including David, Hector, a 2nd year VISTA, and Jennie, a long-time volunteer, and led by Sandra, the VISTA supervisor.]

SANDRA: Thanks to all of your hard work, we have a great event planned for Friday night. I want you all to come and enjoy yourselves. Don't forget to bring your husbands and wives!

[Onscreen: David imagines his partner, Alex, in a thought bubble.]

DAVID (thought): Why didn't I realize this was coming?

Chapter 3

[On screen: David talks to Sandra.]

DAVID: Excuse me, Sandra, can I talk to you about something?

SANDRA: You should be very proud of yourself, David. You've put a lot of work into this event.

DAVID: Thanks. I'm wondering if I should bring my partner, Alex, to the event. I know people in town probably know I'm gay, but knowing is different from seeing two men dance together.

SANDRA: This is your decision, David. But I want you to know you have a right to bring Alex to the dance. I'll stand by you, whatever you decide.

Chapter 4

[On screen: Nate.]

NATE: Sandra was correct. David has a right not to be discriminated against based on his sexual orientation.

Chapter 5

[On screen: David.]

DAVID: This is so tough. I'd love for my colleagues to finally meet Alex, but I don't want to damage the relationships I've worked so hard to build in this community.

Chapter 6

[On screen: Quiz with four choices. As there is no "correct" choice, and all are possible answers, any option selected continues to the next chapter.]

NATE: What would you do if you were David?

A) Take Alex to the dance. People should accept David for who he is.

NATE: Your first reaction is that David should take Alex to the dance. Let's see what some of his peers think.

B) Take Alex to the dance, but don't touch or act like a couple. This could be a good compromise and a first step to introducing Alex to the community.

NATE: Your first reaction is that David should take Alex to the dance, but not act like a couple. Let's see what some of his peers think.

C) Leave Alex at home. David's primary responsibility as a VISTA is to serve his community.

NATE: Your first reaction is that David should leave Alex at home. Let's see what some of his peers think.

D) Stay home with Alex. If they can't be themselves, both might as well not go.

NATE: Your first reaction is that David should stay home with Alex. Let's see what some of his peers think.

Chapter 7

[On screen: Images of Alex, Jennie, Hector, and Loretta, a senior center member.]

NATE: David decides to ask for some advice. Click each person to see what they have to say.

ALEX: We've lived in this town for three months. We go to the park, the stores, and the movies. It's not like people don't know we're gay. I'm tired of not having any friends here. And I wouldn't mind a little networking.

JENNIE: This is a conservative community. You saw how they reacted to some of those PG-13 movies suggested for Movie Night. Don't undo all the good work you've done. Leave Alex at home. Maybe you can bring him to our next internal staff party?

HECTOR: As a VISTA, your number one commitment is to the organization and the community. It might feel uncomfortable to not be yourself all the time, but it's not comfortable to live at the poverty level either. This year is not about you. Take Alex if you want to, but be discreet.

LORETTA: I think you should take Alex to the dance and be proud. You're too young to remember the Civil Rights Movement, but we didn't just sit back and wait for people to change. Sometimes you need to shake things up a bit. You never know. This community just might surprise you.

Chapter 8

[On screen: David.]

DAVID: It's so tough to balance all of this advice. I know this year is about serving my community. Loretta might be right, but I'm not really sure how folks will react. On the other hand, Alex has been so supportive, moving out here with me, he could use a fun night out and a chance to make some connections. But like Sandra said, I'm the one who has to decide. I've been out for a long time and I've learned it's important to be true to myself and my values. There must be a way I can honor my commitment to serve and still maintain my personal integrity.

Chapter 9

[On screen: Interactive exercise with four choices.]

NATE: Now that you've learned a little more about David and the community in which he's serving, how do you feel? What would you do if you were David? Click on each option below to see the potential outcome.

A) Take Alex to the dance. People should accept David for who he is.

NATE: Alex enjoyed a fun evening of dancing and socializing with volunteers and staff. David thought some members of the senior center might have been uncomfortable, but then again, others were very welcoming.

B) Take Alex to the dance, but don't touch or act like a couple. This could be a good compromise and a first step to introducing Alex to the community.

NATE: Alex enjoyed himself and David was happy about his decision to bring him along. While David knows he has the right to be himself, it was also important to him to be sensitive to the potential concerns of the community.

C) Leave Alex at home. David's primary responsibility as a VISTA is to serve his community.

NATE: Alex was disappointed but eventually understood David's decision was based on concerns about protecting his relationship with the community.

D) Stay home with Alex. If they can't be themselves, both might as well not go.

NATE: This decision helped David avoid a potentially awkward situation, but he felt bad for being dishonest with his supervisor and for missing the event he had worked so hard to coordinate.

Chapter 10

[On screen: David.]

NATE: You can see that all of these options have their plusses and minuses. No one knows for sure how events will turn out, and in the end, only David can make the decision that's best for him.

The bottom line is that no matter what the outcome David is protected against harassment and discrimination based on his sexual orientation.

WANDA: Still, this doesn't mean that every situation he faces will be an easy one. As VISTAs, sometimes we walk a fine line between being true to ourselves and being respectful of and sensitive to the culture and needs of the communities we serve. If you find yourself in a similar situation, remember that civil rights protect everyone. Talk through your options with your supervisor and others you trust and make the decision that feels right for you.

Chapter 11

NATE: Good work. You've successfully completed the final scenario in this course.

Conclusion

Chapter 1

[On screen: Wanda and Nate.]

WANDA: Now that you've explored three situations that came up for other VISTAs, do you think you could recognize harassment or discrimination at your own service site?

NATE: Let's review what we've learned.

Chapter 2

WANDA: As you've seen in our three scenarios, discrimination and harassment have several "hallmarks" or characteristics.

Chapter 3

WANDA: Discrimination:

- BOTH targets a person or group because of a difference AND singles them out for different treatment
- May be a one-time occurrence or part of an ongoing pattern
- Can happen to anyone

Chapter 4

NATE: Harassment

- Includes – but isn't limited to – sexual harassment
- Can be spoken words or unspoken actions
- Is more than just annoying or uncomfortable behavior
- Generally happens over a period of time
- Creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive service environment
- Prevents a VISTA from serving effectively
- Can happen to anyone

Chapter 5

[On screen: Wanda and Nate.]

WANDA: Now you can recognize discrimination and harassment when it happens to others. As a VISTA, you also have an obligation to make sure you don't subject anyone else to discrimination or harassment.

NATE: This extends to everyone you come into contact with: clients, colleagues, and volunteers and employees at your service site.

WANDA: Civil rights are for all. Take responsibility for your own actions and communicate when you feel your rights are being violated.

Chapter 6

[On screen: Links to additional materials.]

NATE: Thanks for taking this course. We hope you're more prepared than we were to face these issues. You'll have a chance to ask questions and discuss these issues with other VISTAs at PSO.

WANDA: We wish you the best for your VISTA service!

Your Rights and Responsibilities as a VISTA

Key Points

Your Rights and Responsibilities

You are protected by VISTA and the Corporation for National and Community Service from being subjected to discrimination or harassment. You also have an obligation as a VISTA to make sure you do not subject anyone else to discrimination or harassment. This extends to everyone you come in contact with, including other VISTAs, clients, and volunteers and employees at your service site.

Discrimination

Discrimination is treating people differently because of who they are, where they come from, or the groups they belong to. Discrimination in a VISTA service setting is **illegal** when it targets a person or group based on such **non-merit factors** as race, gender or religion, also known as **protected classes**, which the Corporation for National and Community Service defines as the following:

- Race, color, or national origin
- Sex/gender
- Disability (physical or mental)
- Age
- Religion
- Political affiliation
- Gender identity and expression;
- Sexual orientation

Illegal discrimination:

- BOTH targets a person or group because of a difference AND singles them out for different treatment;
- May be a one-time occurrence or part of an ongoing pattern; and
- Can happen to anyone.

Harassment

Illegal harassment in a VISTA service setting is **severe and/or pervasive** verbal or non-verbal communication relating to an individual's gender, age, race, ethnicity, religion, or other **non-merit factor** that interferes with a VISTA's performance and/or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive service environment. Harassment can consist of spoken or written words, images, or actions, and can happen to anyone. It includes but is not limited to:

- Explicit or implicit demands for sexual favors
- Pressure for one's company
- Unwelcome persistent letters, phone calls, emails or other media

- Distribution or display of offensive material
- Offensive looks, gestures; physical encroachment, or threatening behavior

Illegal harassment:

- Includes – but is not limited to – sexual harassment;
- Can be spoken words or unspoken actions;
- Is more than just annoying or uncomfortable behavior;
- Generally happens over a period of time; and
- Can happen to anyone.

What to Do if You Experience or Witness Discrimination or Harassment

If you feel safe and comfortable doing so, you can approach and talk to the person you suspect of engaging in harassing or discriminating behavior directly yourself. If that doesn't work, or if you do not feel safe and comfortable doing so, you can also talk to your VISTA supervisor.

If you cannot go to your supervisor, or you do and the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction, you can contact your state office (see list of state office contacts below). Finally, you can contact the Corporation's Office of Civil Rights and Inclusiveness or OCRI (see contact information below). If you and/or your VISTA supervisor or state office contact chooses to contact OCRI, note that a claim must be made within 45 days of an incident.

Where to Go For More Information

The Corporation for National and Community Service takes discrimination and harassment very seriously and makes the following resources available to you:

- **Corporation State Office Contacts** – A list of state offices can be found [online at the VISTA Campus](#).
- **Contact Information for OCRI** – Contact OCRI via mail, phone, fax or email at
1201 New York Avenue, NW
Suite 10800
Washington, DC 20525
(202) 606-7503 (hotline)
(202) 606-3472 (TDD)
(202) 606-3465 (fax)
eo@cns.gov (email)
- **Complete List of the Corporation's Official Policies on Discrimination and Harassment**
 These can be found in your PSO Participant Manual, as well as in the online VISTA Member Handbook at <http://vistacampus.org/mod/book/view.php?id=2093&chapterid=2169>.