

SEX WORK *is work*

Work, health and safety resource for independent
sex workers and sex work workplaces*

By sex workers, for sex workers



** this resource was not written with strip clubs, camming or online*

work in mind, but could be adapted for those types of work.



Vixen acknowledges the Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung and Wathaurong people of the Kulin nation as the Sovereign peoples and true owners of the lands we work on. We pay our respects to elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We acknowledge the continued Kulin nation connection to land, water and sky. This land was stolen and sovereignty has never been ceded. Always and always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

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How to use *this resource*

Sex work is work! The implementation of the Sex Work Decriminalisation Act 2022 means that everywhere in so-called Victoria, all sex work is recognised as work, and all sex work workplaces are recognised as workplaces. All workers in Victoria have the right to be safe at work, including sex workers.

Work health and safety (also called occupational health and safety, or OHS) will look different for different sex workers, depending on the type of workplace and services offered.

If you work at a place where an owner, receptionist or manager is making the rules, those rules must be explained to you, and ideally provided in writing. If you work with other sex workers, you should take the time to all agree on your shared rules. Writing them down will improve your ability to create a safe workplace.

Most workplace hazards can be solved in 5 simple steps; **identify, assess, control, review and record**. This approach has been around since the 1940s and is the universal language of work health and safety.



01 | *Identify the hazard*

What are the hazards that could happen at work? These can be everyday things or rare occurrences, faulty furniture or a messy roster.

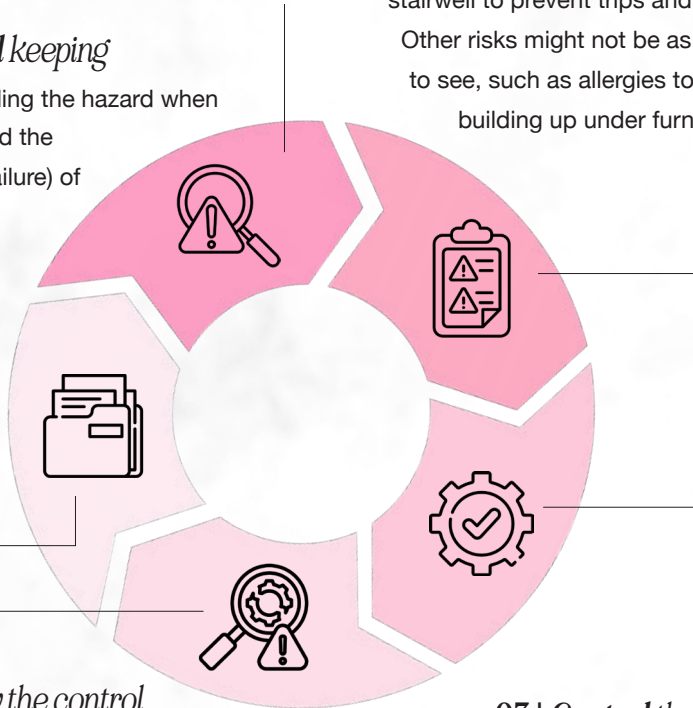
02 | *Assess the risk*

Why do we want to avoid these hazards? Some reasons are super obvious, like better lighting in a stairwell to prevent trips and falls. Other risks might not be as easy to see, such as allergies to dust building up under furniture.

05 | *Record keeping*

Who is recording the hazard when it happens and the success (or failure) of the control?

We avoid tomorrow's hazards and risks by keeping a record today.



04 | *Review the control*

When do we check that the control is effective? Will you add a monthly reminder into the work calendar? Or does it need to be checked at the end of every shift?

or all three? Maybe it's a reminder for the front of house team to check and change the bulbs regularly, and keep ahead of the risk by keeping a stock of spare bulbs on site.

The perfect control is the one that is practical and makes sense for your workplace.

03 | *Control the risk*

How can we prevent these things from happening, or reduce the danger when they do happen? Is the answer to buy new lighting, move the existing lights or change the brightness of the bulbs,

or all three? Maybe it's a reminder for the front of house team to check and change the bulbs regularly, and keep ahead of the risk by keeping a stock of spare bulbs on site.

Anjali | @divineOfferings

Sex Worker



How to use this resource

While the controls described in this document would be considered *minimum standards* in most industries, they are a new way of thinking about safety for sex work workplaces. Many venues may struggle to implement them. We acknowledge that most sex workers are engaged 'at will' as independent contractors, and may find it difficult to advocate for themselves, colleagues and clients with venue managers/operators. However, we hope this resource is a starting point for independent and venue-based sex workers, and sex services premises operators to think about health and safety in sex work, and to implement these standards in their workplaces. It is literally in everyone's best interests to have a safe and healthy workplace everyday, and a shared understanding of what to do in a crisis.

If you have questions about health and safety at work, want to learn more skills and connect with peers, you can contact **Vixen, Victoria's peer-only sex worker organisation**, at: 03 9070 9050 or via email at info@vixen.org.au

This resource is a result of sex worker input during consultations, focus groups and outreach hosted by Vixen and Scarlet Alliance, including the Vixen staff team. Translation checking was conducted by members of the Asian Migrant Sex Worker Advisory Group (AMSWAG).

Who are WorkSafe Victoria *and what do they do?*

Like all workplaces in Victoria, sex work workplaces have a responsibility to identify and minimise risks towards workers, and to keep workplaces reasonably safe.

The role of WorkSafe Victoria is to promote occupational health and safety, and to respond to serious incidents at workplaces. **WorkSafe Victoria are not police, but may attend a workplace if:**

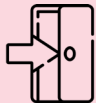


A 'notifiable incident' occurs at the workplace - e.g. a fire, serious electrical shock or death on the premises.



In response to certain complaints (usually from workers).

Inspectors entering a workplace must take all reasonable steps to notify the occupier of the premises (usually the manager on site) of their presence. **WorkSafe Victoria inspectors have the power to:**



Enter a workplace.



Examine the workplace and anything in it, take photographs and measurements, ask questions, and seize and remove any items that require testing.



Require that documents are produced, and make copies of those documents.



WorkSafe Victoria inspectors may request a person's name and address, but only if:



the inspector reasonably believes the person may help them investigate an offence, or



the inspector reasonably believes the person has committed or is about to commit an offence, and



the inspector has informed the person of the grounds for their belief, making sure the person understands the nature of the offence.

WorkSafe Victoria may bring police, interpreters and technical experts to inspections.

WorkSafe Victoria may not enter any part of a workplace that is used as a residence, unless they have a search warrant.

WorkSafe Victoria inspectors may issue directions (tell people what to do), if the inspector believes there is an immediate risk to anyone's health or safety. These directions must be followed.

Remember: WorkSafe Victoria has the same powers in relation to every workplace in Victoria, there are no special powers or rules for sex work workplaces.

Training, management & safety strategies

Initial workplace training & refresher training

All workers that are new to a premises should be provided with a tour and basic training specific to each workplace **before their first shift**. This should involve:



A tour of the facilities and venue layout - including location of toilets, emergency exits and first aid supplies.



Explaining the workplace approach to intros, and other policies around clients including negotiating with clients before the booking and how clients are managed inside the building.



Directing workers to the workplace supply of condoms including what types, sizes and lubricants the workplace has.



Explaining the workplace policy on visual STI checks, and showing workers the lighting that is used for checks.



Letting workers know it is their right to refuse clients, or to refuse to offer services outside of their personal boundaries.



Explaining systems and processes for laundry, cleaning and condom/ppe disposal.

If a workplace cannot meet this expectation, management may not be taking responsibility for OHS at that venue.



If the workplace has a written policy on visual STI checks, this should be provided to workers before they commence their first shift.

Best practice is that new workers are trained by experienced peers on how to negotiate the use of condoms, provide services safely, protect oneself from risk, conduct a visual STI check and what to do if a serious incident takes place, such as stealthing or assault. **All new workers should have access to information on starting sex work, sex work health and safety and processes for each workplace.** Sex workers are safer sex and wellbeing experts - experienced sex workers are a fountain of knowledge for information and advice. The Vixen team is able to host, lead and facilitate training for new workers at drop-in, or on outreach. Even if there is an experienced worker on-site, it is still helpful to encourage new workers to access training via Vixen. Hearing those same tips and skills outside of the specific workplace context can embed the learning and assist with recall.

Regardless of how long we've been in the industry, we are always learning, and as sex workers we regularly engage in skill-sharing and have incredibly strong peer education abilities. There is always something new to learn!



Ishtar Hope | @artfuldolebludger

Brothel based sex worker and former street based sex worker.



Training, management and safety strategies

Substandard visual STI checking, lack of PPE, confusion about PPE (where located and correct use).

01 | Identify

Lack of use of daily tools for safety in the workplace, inability to access required solutions in a crisis.

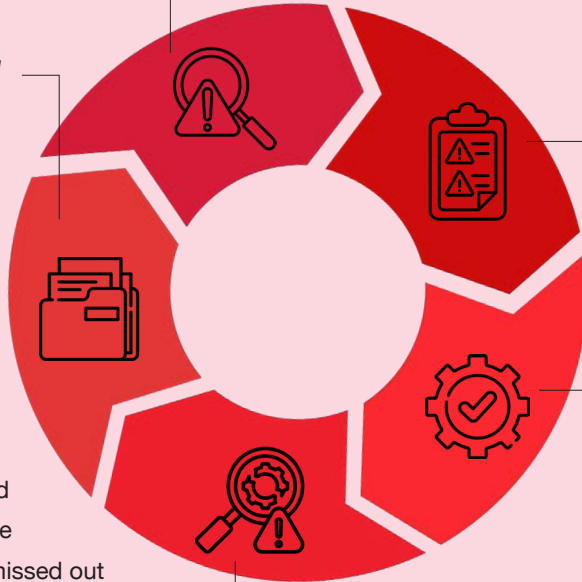
05 | Record

Keep a record of how often the training is run and who attends.

Did workers find it accessible and useful? Is there anyone who missed out because they were sick that shift?

04 | Review

Training content should be evaluated every time it is run, to ensure it is relevant and accessible to workers in that workplace.



03 | Control

Training and refresher training regularly offered for new workers and people already on the roster, specific to that workplace. Have designated trainings on site with workers who are able to run the workshop. Vixen outreach workers may be able to assist with training and provide information and resources.

Types of workplaces, shifts and rosters

Some sex work workplaces insist on long shifts on-site, which can potentially increase opportunities for income, but can also lead to stress, fatigue and burnout. Everyone has a different idea of the best way to work. Are you looking for peace and quiet at work? Do you like doing longer shifts, or do you prefer to leave after a shorter shift? Do you like brothels with loud music and lots of different workers to meet? Does the workplace permit breaks as needed, or are they strict about when workers are expected to be available for intros? Day shift or night shift?

Workplaces should avoid insisting on longer shifts and should always allow workers to take breaks whenever they need. It's a good idea for workers to ask workplaces about their expectations for shift length, shift numbers, and remaining on-site between bookings and during breaks, so they can find a workplace that suits their needs. It may be useful to talk to a peer who currently or has previously worked at the venue to get an understanding of the workplace expectations and culture.

Burnout is real and can have long term negative impacts on mental health, physical health and income security.

"I'm picky about my workplace. I really like a quiet space, and day shifts.

It's important for me to have good customers and a good boss. I try to find a good workplace because there are so many options and so bosses."



01 | *Identify*

Working long hours, unclear rules about breaks, roster that doesn't suit workers needs, fatigue.

02 | *Assess*

Burnout, mental and physical health impacts, incidents and accidents.

05 | *Record*

Problems with rostering, filling shifts and retaining workers can be signs of a fatigued workforce. Don't wait for a critical incident to occur. Addressing fatigue is in everyone's interests.

04 | *Review*

Routinely reassess if the roster is working for everyone. Implement changes and adjustments as needed.

03 | *Control*

Roster processes, shift length/numbers and other workplace expectations are recorded and clearly communicated to new and current workers.



My rules with clients *my boundaries for me*

Maintaining boundaries is key for sex workers - managing our health and wellbeing with management, co-workers and clients, and feeling confident in saying “no” and “yes” in negotiation with clients directly.

It's important to take a break when you have had enough. Nobody has the right to force you to work like a machine non-stop - you have the right to take care of yourself and your health, and it will support your business in the long term. ***Taking a break when we need to can solve problems before they happen.***

Rules with clients, boundaries for me

In the room, the worker is the boss. Outside of the room, the boss is there to back up the workers' boundaries.

Being able to say no to clients, being able to leave and being in control of the booking are the most important skills a sex worker can learn. There is no time for wondering “I don't know if I am allowed to leave or what to say or if I should do this.” It is essential to know that the venue manager will have your back when you assert your boundaries in the room.

“I notice that when I'm really tired, bad bookings tend to happen more often. Now I work shorter shifts so I can make sure I have the energy, attention and focus to assert boundaries in the room”



“I am able to say no to clients, I am in control of what is happening.”

Workers should have a clear understanding of when and how to say no in the room. OHS cannot be tokenistic. It should be expressly understood that **saying ‘no’ will not get you fired.**

You could try practising different ways of saying ‘no’, share ‘scripts’ with co-workers, or role-play with each other to become more comfortable with making rules and asserting boundaries. Vixen’s resource My Service, My Rules also contains information on how to negotiate and provide services you are comfortable with.

“It’s important for sex workers to have very strong boundaries.

I look back and wonder “where were my boundaries?” In the past, my

boundaries were not strong enough. I would do things for more money

and in the end, I wasn’t happy. Now I’m at peace with saying no.”

01 | *Identify*

Unclear decision making in the workplace in relation to clients, bookings and sex acts, workers feel pressured into taking bookings.

02 | *Assess*

Physical and mental health impacts.

05 | *Record*

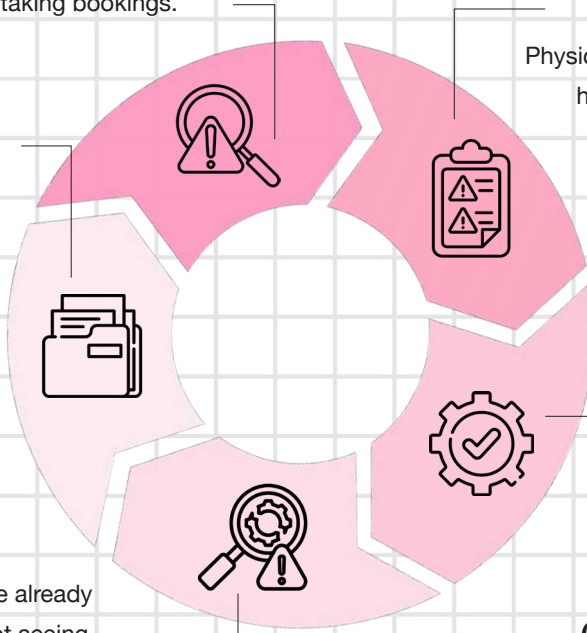
Keep records of clients the workers on shift **don't** see, avoid situations where a worker is stuck in an intro with a client they have already identified as not seeing.

03 | *Control*

Explicit workplace protocols about what happens when workers do not want to see clients.

04 | *Review*

Do workers understand how to communicate to management that they do not want to see a client?
Are workers making use of these protocols, and are they being followed?



UglyAlienSpitBaby

Sex worker and artist living and working in Naarm



Client hygiene

Clients with poor hygiene is a common gripe amongst sex workers, but there are ways to try to manage this. Sex work workplaces should have facilities for client hygiene (e.g. showers, hand basins, wipes, hand sanitiser and sufficient linens) and workers should be supported to mandate that clients use these.

“So they go into the bathroom and come out again and they aren’t clean,

do I really have to tell them how to clean their penis? Again?”

“Some clients are stinky even after they have showered. For

the next person, I leave the door open. I also use Glen20 and

deodorant to air it out.”



My rules with clients, my boundaries for me

01 | Identify

Client not showering effectively.
Presence of dead skin and detritus.

05 | Record

If there is a regular who is known to avoid showering or has bacterial problems, add it to the Ugly Mug info so that workers going into the booking know what to expect.

04 | Review

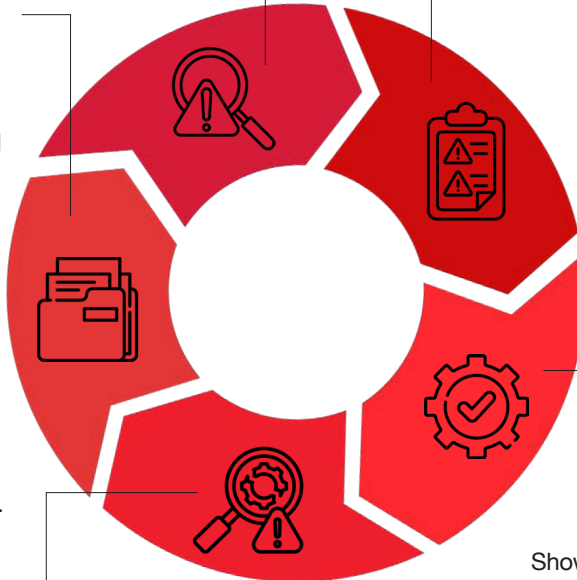
This problem seems to be age old. Check in with the team and coworkers about what is working - discussing communication, mechanics and room layout is a good way to review the culture of client shower-use.

02 | Assess

Body odour overwhelming the room during and after the booking. Chafing increases risk of infection transmission.

03 | Control

Showering with the client (if this is a service you offer), or instructing them from outside the shower. Ventilation in rooms. Having a short time period between clients as necessary in the room to allow airing out. Changing linen between each client. Sometimes alternative soaps or towels can make a difference. As tempting as it is, signage is not known to work and instead creates visual clutter and confusion.



De-escalation

All workers should be supported to leave bookings if they are feeling uncomfortable. It is then management's job to deal with Ugly Mugs.

Trust your gut. If you get bad vibes from a client, it's your right to handle it how you see fit. If you don't feel comfortable taking the booking or continuing with the booking, it is your right to refuse to see the client or ask the client to leave. **You can choose to assert different boundaries with different clients depending on your instincts.**



Some clients you might choose only to see in a doubles booking.



You might decide to spend longer talking with the client before deciding to take the booking or not.



You might decide to only offer some services, or alternative services.

Trusting your instincts by leaving a booking you're not comfortable in is a valuable self-preservation tactic.

Put simply: It's not the job of the worker to accept every client and to deal with removing them. Clients are a patron of the venue, and the venue has a responsibility to ensure that everyone working there has a safe working environment. ***This is a fundamental right of every worker, regardless of whether you are an employee, a contractor or sub-contractor.***





Management strategies to support workers against Ugly Mugs

Ugly Mugs are bad clients who do not follow the protocols, rules or expected behaviour of clients at that workplace. The best approach is to have systems in place so they are brought to the attention of management or reception **before the booking takes place**. Preventing workers from having to deal with Ugly Mugs in the room is a responsibility of management.

“A problem with brothel owners is allowing known Ugly Mugs to enter the venue and then unsuspecting workers will end up in bookings with them.”

Operators of sex services premises should have documented methods to support workers against Ugly Mugs and methods to prevent Ugly Mug incidents, such as:



Posters or information in the intro room for clients, outlining workplace expectations of client behaviour.



Posters or a noticeboard in the dressing room area for workers, with pictures/information about Ugly Mugs who are known to the venue.



Workplace policy about turning away serial Ugly Mugs.



Workplace policy supporting workers to report crimes if they occur in the workplace if they choose.

“When managers accuse you of things clients say (lies), then you feel like you can’t speak up later. You feel like you cannot challenge the client or set boundaries. The managers are meant to look after our safety but they are not!”



My rules with clients, my boundaries for me

01 | Identify

Ugly Mugs having access to the workplace.

05 | Record

Every Ugly Mug incident, even small, should be documented, because it provides clues and insight into new preventative measures.

04 | Review

Encourage regular check-ins about how the measures are going - are they working, what can be added?

02 | Assess

Physical and mental health impacts, criminal offences committed by Ugly Mugs against workers.



03 | Control

Documented measures specific to that workplace about how to prevent first-time and recurrent Ugly Mugs. Encourage workers to reach out to Vixen for support with Ugly Mugs and difficult clients.

Sexual assault *is a crime*

Any sex without consent is a crime. This includes sex without consent that occurs in a sex industry workplace. Being a sex worker does not mean that you give broad consent to all sexual acts with one or another client, or any person. Consent is established and agreed to openly, both at the beginning and throughout the duration of a booking, through verbal and non-verbal communication.

A sex worker agreeing to one sexual act in a booking does not mean the worker has agreed to more or other sexual acts. Seeing one client for full service doesn't mean the worker consents to offer full service to **every** client who comes to the venue. Consent can be withdrawn before or during any booking, **even if it has previously been given.**

Non-payment *is a crime*

Non-payment, also known as 'fraudulent inducement', 'fraudulent misrepresentation' or sometimes 'sex obtained by fraud' is the **reversal, theft, underpayment, counterfeit money, fake payment or absence of payment for sex work services.** 'Payment' also includes trade or 'sex for favours' - where sex acts are exchanged for favours or non-monetary benefits - if the favour or agreed exchange is withdrawn or does not happen, then consent has also been withdrawn. Clients in so-called Australia know they are expected to pay for the booking before it happens. ***If an Ugly Mug deliberately avoids, reverses or retains payment, they have committed a crime.***



Stealthling is a crime

The word ‘stealthling’ describes non-consensual removal or tampering with a condom during sexual activity. We acknowledge that the term has a separate meaning for older English-speaking LGBTI+ community as a derogatory term to describe trans people who ‘pass’, and some sex workers and allies may be uncomfortable with its use. We are using it here as it is the most widely used term among English-speaking sex workers, however many sex workers and allies prefer describing this as ‘non-consensual condom tampering or removal.’ Often in sex work, using **a condom is a condition of agreeing to sex, and if the condom is removed or tampered with, our consent is voided.**

“Keep an eye on clients in case they take the condom off.”

“There is a chance to protect yourself and be careful, because some customers can take off the condom, like in doggy style. If you have worries you should be supported to just do hand relief.”

Note: If you have experienced a consent violation at work, you can get in touch with Vixen to get support and talk through your options.

Sex worker solidarity *in the workplace*

Relying on each other for information is the best way to keep ourselves safe.

Solidarity is an essential ingredient of OHS/decrim. As co-workers, we don't need to all be friends, but we each have a role in ensuring we all have a safe working environment. We are not each other's enemies.

“Be kind to yourself and your co-workers. Be nice and open minded to each other. Sex work can be competitive, but good OHS relies upon us being unselfish and friendly to each other.”

In any industry and any workplace, there will be co-workers we don't always get along with. These are normal feelings, but ***we need to help each other and learn from each other.***

“Supporting each other in the workplace creates happy and beautiful work environments. Give it a go! You don't have to like your co-workers, but everyone has the right to feel safe at work. I work in the brothel, I have worked in almost 50 different brothels, every shift and every brothel we face new ways to show support for each other.”

Knowing how to interact well with other workers is an OHS skill. Practise it everyday because ***your coworkers are the people who can support you in a crisis.***

“Sometimes other workers don't like me and tell lies to clients. This is not fair. We have to accept that some workplaces are rough. We can help each other.”



01 | Identify

Interpersonal conflict in the workspace, low morale, lack of cohesion in a crisis.

02 | Assess

Avoidable incidents, injury and accidents. Physical and mental health impacts.

05 | Record

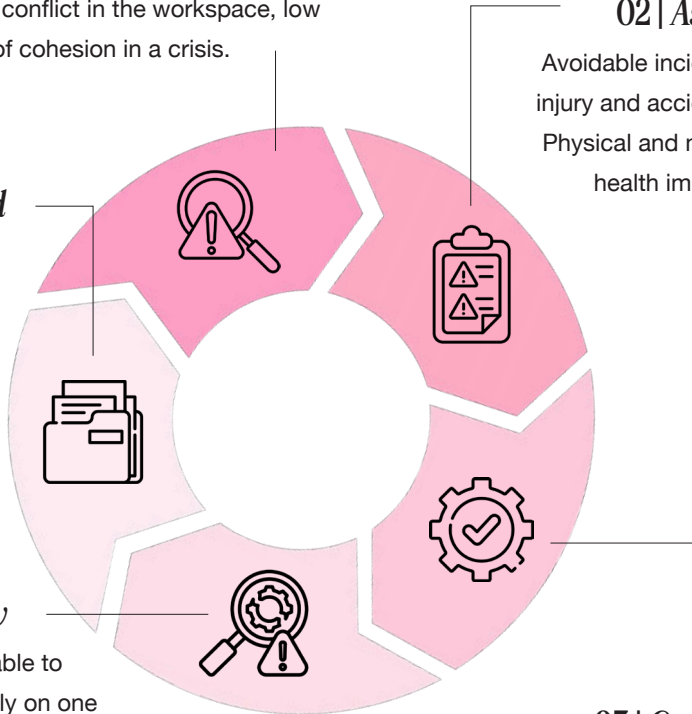
Keep de-identified records of dispute resolution processes.

04 | Review

Are workers able to confidently rely on one another in day-to-day situations and/or crisis situations? Evaluate use of grievance and dispute resolution processes. Seek advice from friends and colleagues. Open one of the least-used work rooms as a quiet space for in-between bookings, as physical distance can alleviate stress.

03 | Control

Maintaining camaraderie, clear grievance and dispute resolution processes. Having options for workers to not have to interact in-between bookings can help with clearing the air. Acknowledge not everyone will get along but OHS is still a priority.



Creating a more *accessible workplace*

Many sex workers live with disability and/or chronic illness, and many disabled people engage the services of sex workers. ***Making sex work workplaces more disability and chronic-illness friendly is good for business***, both in terms of contributing to staff wellbeing and attracting clients. Many disabilities are ‘invisible’ - we may not know if someone is disabled, so it makes sense for our workplaces to be as inclusive as possible. .

General physical accessibility and facilities for disabled workers and clients

Is your workplace accessible for both workers and clients? Does your building meet existing accessibility standards, and can you accommodate workers and clients who use mobility aids? Are workers able to openly discuss disability and/or chronic illness and to bring suggestions to management about how the venue is organised? Are workers and clients who use mobility aids able to move around the workplace with ease? Are there ground-level rooms and lifts?

Accessibility includes the ability to move around the space - doorway width, entry ramps, lifts, and hoists in workrooms. Victorian building renovation and heritage rules can make it tricky to modify existing locations for accessibility. Some apartments and locations will not be able to be altered. If your location cannot be altered, you could visit the client's location or see them at a third-party accessible venue (e.g. a hotel). Vixen and Scarlet Alliance recommend learning more about providing services to clients with disability from the organisation Touching Base - they provide excellent resources and training.



01 | Identify

Inviting workers and clients with mobility barriers into spaces that are not accessible.

02 | Assess

Injury due to attempts to move around an inaccessible space.

05 | Record

Injuries and near injuries should be recorded.

04 | Review

Check in with venue staff and patrons that accessibility information is clear and accurate. Sex workers can also consider keeping skills fresh by attending Touching Base training sessions.

03 | Control

Review information on accessibility from the Victorian Building Authority, provide clear and accurate information for workers and clients on venue accessibility.



Workspace | Risk Management

01 | Identify

Poor workspace design, auditory sensory overload (music, tv), visual sensory overload (signage, flashing lights).

02 | Assess

Flare-ups of chronic illness, intensification or triggering of chronic pain, injury, RSI, distraction, accidents.

05 | Record

Injuries and near injuries should be recorded.



04 | Review

Discuss and evaluate if the floorplan is working for everyone. Somebody moved something? Maybe it was because the designated location needs to be changed. Learn from incidents, large or small.

03 | Control

Design of workspace to minimise risk.



Accessible workspace layout

The set up of your workspace will impact safety for yourself, your coworkers and your clients. The layout and processes can be fine tuned to reduce the expenditure of unnecessary physical and neurological effort for workers.

This includes the consideration of:



Moving between different work spaces (eg the introduction area to the room where the booking will take place, or between the lounge, bedroom and bathroom).



Location of beds, tables or other equipment.



Awareness of the walking path between washing facilities and workroom.



Where your money is stashed, and where the supplies are set up so you don't have to over extend to reach your essentials.

All of these strategies are good OHS for preventing injury as well as accommodating chronic pain and fatigue.

As well as physical design, you might find ways in the workplace to reduce sensory overload for workers. It is also important to ensure sufficient time between bookings for workers to clean the room, replenish supplies, take a break and rest if required.

These efforts will pay off for everyone, not only sex workers who live with disability and chronic illness.

Quiet Spaces

Our workplaces can be noisy and busy. Some venues have a quiet room, in addition to the back room, set aside so workers can spend time alone and without sensory input while waiting for bookings or intros, for example an overflow work room or disability-accessible room on the ground floor. This should be separate from, and in addition to, the designated smoking space.

Ideally, this space is somewhere low-volume, can have low lighting and/or everyone wearing their headphones. The goal is to have a space for sex workers to have “a moment” away from the music, lights, talking and smells in the rest of the venue.



Sensory | Risk Management

01 | Identify

Constant unnecessary sensory input while waiting in between clients.

02 | Assess

Fatigue, triggers, chronic illness flare-ups, divided attention causing accidents.

05 | Record

Take notes when the quiet space is used most or least. This can assist with rostering, planning and general ability of the venue to provide optimum OHS.

04 | Review

Ensure the rules of the use of the quiet space are clear, check in and evaluate how the rules are fitting the needs of workers.

03 | Control

Identify a quiet space that can be used always, sometimes or conditionally.



Workspace *hazard prevention*

Building facilities

Management should ensure that workplace facilities are maintained. This includes:



Functional and regularly tested **fire alarms and fire safety supplies**.



A **bin for needles (sharps disposal)** with clear signage.



Hand basins in the venue for frequent hand washing before handling supplies or money, after shaking hands at intro and on the way out of the working rooms.



Bins for used condoms disposal in a place that maximises ease of use.



Appropriate lighting in the workroom to conduct efficient visual STI checks.



Well-stocked and quickly accessible **first aid kits**.



01 | Identify

Essential facilities inaccessible, non-existent or unmarked.

05 | Record

A checklist and suggested time lapse between checks of facilities can be handy.



02 | Assess

Injury, infection, death.

04 | Review

Receptionist or manager duties can include regularly checking that building facilities are in working order and in their designated location. Somebody moved something? Maybe it was because the designated location needs to be changed.

03 | Control

Essential facilities should be sign-posted, intuitively located, and/or easy to find.

Floors, spills, slips and trips



Making sure the **floors are clear** in between bookings can prevent falls and trips. Wrappers, tissues and wipes can be a hazard on hardwood floors. Lube on floors is also an everyday hazard. What is your process for checking the floors?



Workers may choose to remove high heels when going up or down stairs (especially when carrying things), doing heavy cleaning, changing sheets etc.



The best scenario is that a wet area is not slippery when wet - install low or non-slip surfaces if possible. For workplace locations and tiles or floors that are slippery when wet, you can **lay out bath mats** for yourself and clients to walk on and try to keep these areas dry between bookings.

“My in-call wet area was slippery. I threw bath mats on the floor but clients would just walk around them with dangerously wet feet. Often the client got out of the shower without drying themselves and went onto the bed fully wet. There was wetness everywhere before the booking even started! Now I don’t let them do anything that I cannot do for them, because they end up not doing anything. I end up drying them like I’m their mother. The lights are good in there so I get on my knees and do the visual while drying around their ball sack. It’s a win-win solution.”



Trips and Falls | Risk Management

01 | *Identify*

Trips and falls.

02 | *Assess*

Injury.

05 | *Record*

Record all instances of injuries or near injuries.

03 | *Control*

In between bookings check that the floors are clear of debris, water and lube on floors is cleaned.

04 | *Review*

Random spot checks when the venue isn't busy can be very useful.



Regular deep cleaning

The moist and humid nature of our work, such as steamy showers, sweat, body fluids, and lube in carpeted rooms means that dust can congeal in ways differently than a usual domestic or office space.

‘Drop sheets’ and wiping down hard surfaces in between clients does keep everything visibly hygienic from booking to booking. However, the **cleaning undertaken in-between bookings is not enough to prevent gunk build up in soft furnishings, mould and other nasties.**



Curtains, carpets, mattresses and couches can be steam cleaned or replaced.



Cushions can be washed at high temperatures.



If workers are seeing black gunk on the bottom of their feet, now is the time for management to organise a deep clean.



Check for mould in tile grout, and also near wet areas.

Note: Don't rely on co-workers or clients to tell you there is a concern about cleanliness. Let's face it, by the time it is noticeable it is too late.

Instead, clean regularly and clean often.



Bacteria | Risk Management

01 | Identify

Bacteria and mould growing in soft moist corners of the workroom.

02 | Assess

Illness and allergy triggers.

05 | Record

Keep notes about how often and what is being done during the deep cleaning cycle. Vic Health has free detailed information about suggested and specific cleaning procedures on their website.

04 | Review

Are there certain areas that need cleaning more frequently and others that do not?



03 | Control

Regular deep cleaning of the entire workspace.

Soft furnishings

Mattresses in sex work workplaces tend to get a workout. Old, worn-out and saggy mattresses, pillows, cushions, chairs and couches can harbour bacteria and mould, and can also lead to sprains, joint injuries, etc. Bedbugs and other small insects can also be an issue. Couches in dressing rooms and back rooms ***must*** be replaced if they become infested with bed bugs or lice. Consider purchasing low-allergy mattresses suitable for commercial use and/or waterproof mattress and pillow protectors, and creating a register for when soft furnishings are purchased and creating a timeframe for replacement.

Linen

Dirty linen creates risks of infection transmission, as well as increasing the risk of mould, and allergy triggers. ***The best practice is to use clean towels and sheets for each booking,*** but a cover on couches and fresh drop sheets for every booking is also an acceptable option. ***Re-using sheets and towels on beds and massage tables generates health risks for both clients and workers.***

Workers need access to sufficient clean linens and towels. This can be difficult if operating from a hotel, but you can always ask reception for extra towels at the start of your stay, or even sneak some extras from the pool or gym area if available. Some supermarkets and other shops offer instant delivery of towels and cleaning supplies via apps like Uber Eats, which can be expensive but can provide a hygienic option in an emergency.

Workplaces must have access to a washing machine & dryer in good working order (either on or off site) to clean towels and linens. Each workplace should have clear information on whose responsibility it is to do laundry. If workers are expected to assist with laundry, this information should be provided prior to a worker commencing work, with training and appropriate PPE provided.





02 | Assess

Infection transmission. Bacteria and mould generating illness, risk of sprains and/or joint injuries, lice and bed bugs spreading to workers' homes.

01 | Identify

Old, worn-out mattresses, infestations of bed bugs/lice.

05 | Record

Keep a 'mattress register' of when each mattress was purchased, with an agreed timeframe for review or replacement. Document incidents of bed bugs and lice.

04 | Review

When do mattresses need replacing? How often should you get a new couch? Each workplace will have different needs, depending on opening hours and foot traffic.

03 | Control

Purchasing commercial mattresses and mattress protectors. Removing and destroying any soft furnishings impacted by bed bugs or lice.



01 | Identify

Insufficient linen and towels, with inadequate laundry facilities for cleaning.

02 | Assess

Infection transmission, illness, allergy triggers.

05 | Record

Provide information to new and existing workers on laundry facilities and processes, including information on who is responsible for doing laundry, and the processes and equipment that should be used.

03 | Control

Ensuring sufficient linens and towels available, access to laundry washing/drying facilities with clear lines of responsibility.

04 | Review

Who is responsible for doing laundry? What processes are used to ensure workers have access to sufficient clean towels and linens and that laundry is done to a hygienic standard?



Security, CCTV and comms



Panic buttons

These can be useful safety tools, but may also escalate some difficult to manage clients. If a workplace has panic buttons installed, workers should be trained as to where they are located, what sound they will make, volume and who is alerted when the panic button is activated (eg - does it automatically summon police or merely alert reception?). Whether or not a workplace has panic buttons, workers should be trained how to alert others (eg - by banging on walls or floors) if they feel at risk.



Buzzers/in-room intercom systems

Workers should be trained in the operation of in-room buzzers/intercom systems, with clear information provided as to when reception/management staff will use these to communicate with workers. If these are used to signal the end of bookings, reception/management staff should ensure workers have sufficient time to end the booking and for the client and worker to shower and clean up before the booking time has ended.



CCTV

CCTV systems should be in good working order, checked regularly, and workers made aware as to how any recordings are stored, monitored, used and deleted. Ideally, CCTV monitors should be placed in areas where workers can view footage before meeting the client.



01 | *Identify*

Panic buttons, buzzers/in-room intercom systems are not maintained or improperly used.

02 | *Assess*

Physical and mental health impacts.

05 | *Record*

Keep a record of equipment checks, battery replacement and training.



04 | *Review*

Regular routine checks of the equipment. Unscheduled spot checks are also useful.

03 | *Control*

Working CCTV and comms from room to reception. Buzzers and/or panic buttons as appropriate to the workplace. Induction and unscheduled spot training to keep all on premises skilled at operating safety equipment.

Temperature control

It is the responsibility of management to make sure an appropriate temperature is maintained across the many spaces that workers will use during a shift. This includes acceptable temperature modulation between rooms, regular servicing of air conditioners and heaters, good ventilation and back up plans if equipment fails (fans, plug in heaters).

If the temperature at work is **too cold**, especially in winter, workers will be wearing many layers and then have to de-layer to go into the intro, ruining makeup and wigs to pull clothes off. Having a warm workspace without doors blowing in cold air every time a client arrives is super important for good OHS.

If the temperature at work is **too hot**, especially in summer, sweat ruins makeup, wigs become unbearable and clients get sweaty immediately after stepping out of the shower. A cool workplace with reasonable humidity means workers and clients are happier to arrive (and stay).

“There is too much heat during winter. All the oxygen is emptied out of the room and we have so many arguments about the temperature.”

**“I didn’t know how often I’d be sick
(tonsillitis, colds, body aches) when I started sex work.”**



Temperature | Risk Management

01 | Identify

Irregular air temperature across the workplace.

05 | Record

Routine for equipment maintenance, documentation of equipment outages and use/storage/maintenance of back-up equipment.

02 | Assess

Illness.

04 | Review

Thermometers should be visible in relevant locations. Schedule checks that heating and cooling equipment is in working order.

03 | Control

Identify optimum temperature, methods of temperature control appropriate to the workplace, how to achieve it and put it into action.



Hole Money

Sex Worker





Hygiene and *infection control*

Hand Hygiene

You are naked and have just finished a booking, covered in lube, sweaty and desperate to wash your hands. Tempted to lean into a shower stall or spas to wash your hands? It's a safer option to use a hand basin if there's one nearby. If not, how about a towel to de-grease followed by hand sanitiser?

Whether you're doing escort, brothel, street or massage work, there will be a hand hygiene method that suits you. 'Hand Hygiene Australia' are a great organisation with free online learning modules, posters and information on their website:

hha.org.au



Hygiene and infection control



01 | *Identify*

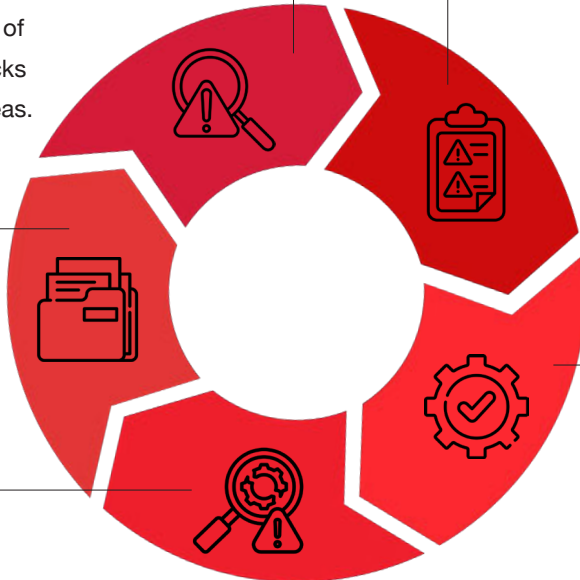
Infection transmission via hands.

05 | *Record*

Keep a record of blue light checks of problem areas.

02 | *Assess*

Infection transmission.



03 | *Control*

Plan your method of hand hygiene before undertaking any booking. Ensure workplaces have facilities to maximise hand hygiene.

04 | *Review*

Try blue light checks around all touch-points regularly. This can tell you where and when in the workspace hand hygiene needs a solution.

Visual STI check policy

There is no right or wrong visual STI policy in the workplace, as long as it is fair, clear and everyone knows what the expectations are. ***It's important that this information is written down and that workers understand how visual STI checks are conducted in the workplace before they commence working.*** This doesn't have to be long or complicated. Examples of a workplace visual STI check policy could be:



The worker will complete a visual STI check, and they have autonomy in deciding if they will see the client or not.



There may be a second and third check conducted by another worker before the worker will decide to go ahead with the booking.



If a client fails the visual STI check, they may be offered an alternative service. This service is determined by the worker, and is appropriate to the situation. If the client is not interested in alternatives, then it is the worker's right to refuse to conduct the service.

Any instances of 'second checks' and 'alternate services' ***should not*** be used to shame, vilify or pressure workers into accepting bookings with clients who have failed the visual STI check.

“One time I realised I was not comfortable at all to do the booking, not even an alternative booking, due to the state of the clients genitals. The client was portly and would not have been able to look down and see his penis. Rather than have an argument or insult the person, I made an excuse, left the room and told the receptionist to communicate with the client because I wasn't able to.”





Conducting visual STI checks

Scarlet Alliance Red Book Online has extensive information about conducting visual STI checks, and pictures of symptomatic infections you can reference. However, these pictures are often of advanced symptomatic infections, which may not reflect early-stage or asymptomatic transmissible presentations. Red Book photos are extreme because they are pictures of STIs at their worst.

Sex workers aren't doctors (unless we have done that study), and we are not diagnosing a client with an STI. **The purpose of a visual STI check is to see if there is anything present on the skin, or any broken skin, that could be a source of transmission or infection** - giving us the choice to minimise our risks or decline the booking.

Some sex workers might have experienced STIs in our personal life, or we might feel very confident in conducting visual STI checks, but it is OK to be unsure. **Lots of STIs do not show symptoms at all**, or share similarities with benign and non-transmissible skin conditions. If you see something that makes you uncomfortable, your range of options could include:



Offer an alternative booking.



Put a bandaid over broken skin.



Use latex gloves.



Internal condom to reduce skin-to-skin contact.



Get a second opinion or cancel the booking.





“I am super grateful that the brothel I started at had a booklet about STIs with images, that was great.”

Second opinions

It can be one of the hardest decisions of our work to turn down a booking or risk a client walking out when a shift has been slow. If you aren't certain if you have recognised transmission risk in a check you have conducted, ***you can ask a coworker to conduct a second opinion*** STI visual check for you. They may reassure you by confirming they believe the visual symptom is a transmission risk, or not. Relying on another person for a second check is reasonable, useful and good OHS practice. Your workplace ***written Visual STI Check Policy*** should contain a section on 'second opinions' - outlining what happens when a worker conducts a visual STI check and sees something they are unsure of or uncomfortable with.

Some workers feel very strongly that second opinions should not be conducted by receptionists, and that it should be a co-worker. ***Even if the second opinion 'passes,' the first worker should still have the option of turning down the booking.*** Other workers prefer when the second opinion is done by the receptionist, because when it fails it should be the receptionist letting the client know. Whatever happens in your workplace, it should be clearly recorded and communicated so that all workers understand how to conduct a visual STI check, and what the next steps are if they are uncomfortable or uncertain about proceeding with a booking.

Alternative services

Some workers may be comfortable offering alternative services to clients who 'fail' visual health checks, and/or specifying to the client that latex gloves, dental dams etc will be used.



01 | Identify

Workplaces do not have a clear policy on visual STI checks, and workers do not know or are uncertain how or when to conduct these.

05 | Record

Ensure that all workers understand the workplace Visual STI Check Policy, and are confident in conducting checks, seeking second opinions and are supported to provide or decline alternative services if appropriate.

04 | Review

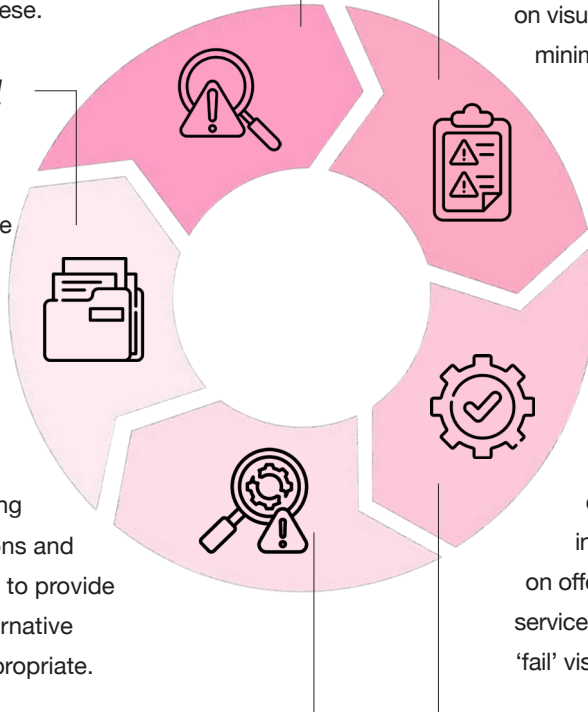
Check in with workers that the Visual STI Check Policy is working effectively. What happens when a second check is needed - is the second opinion process working? Do workers feel comfortable to offer or decline to provide alternative services?

02 | Assess

STI transmission.

03 | Control

Written workplace policy on visual STI check. At minimum this should comply with Red Book recommended procedure, and include a section on when, how and who is responsible for second opinions. It may include a section on offering alternative services to clients who 'fail' visual STI checks.



Managers should support workers to use PPE

Some bosses will suggest that workers don't need to use condoms to provide services, but it is not good for your business to be pressured into work practices you would not choose on your own.



Managers should support worker health. If clients ask for a service without protection, the manager should support the decision of the worker, and not pressure the worker.



Everything goes better with water based lubricant. Oil causes latex to tear and damage.



Workers should have access to individual lube bottles or sachets. Shared bottles can be unsanitary and lead to infection transmission.



Using two condoms does not increase safety - due to the friction it creates tearing and breakages can occur.



Use a single condom once only, and change condom when switching between workers in doubles bookings, and if switching between vaginal and anal sex.



Dispose of used condoms using the dedicated workplace method.

Do your best to protect yourself. ***If you have a condom slip or break, don't panic.*** Infections can be treated. There is a chance you may have been exposed, but it's not a 100% chance. Stay calm, get support from your co-workers and follow best practice as suggested on Red Book.



01 | Identify

PPE misuse or lack of use.

02 | Assess

STI/BBV transmission, non-sexually transmissible health conditions (e.g. chronic thrush and bacterial vaginosis).

05 | Record

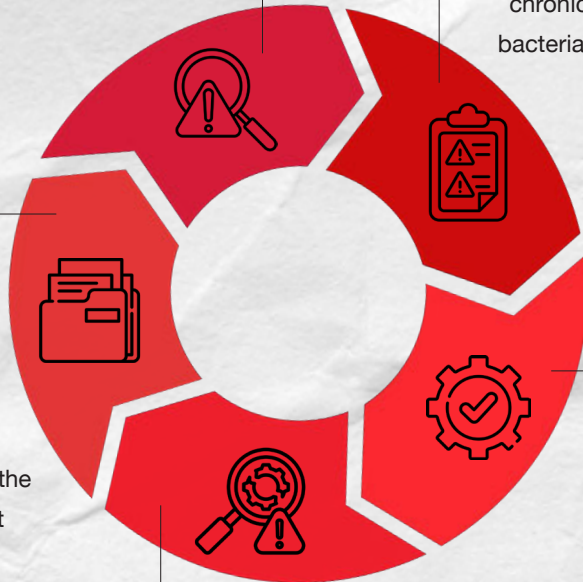
Debrief and problem solve about the behaviour of bad bosses with the peer educators at Vixen.

04 | Review

Information on site for all workers to understand their rights in relation to PPE.

03 | Control

PPE training and backing up workers when clients demand otherwise. Clear and written workplace policy about PPE usage.



OHS for private/independent workers & collectives

For private/independent workers and collectives, communication and knowledge sharing are critical aspects of how we develop our OHS practices.

You may be working privately for yourself, but having a larger network of strong connections with other workers, friends, check-in buddies or support staff can help you when it comes to OHS. It can feel hard to figure out where to begin researching OHS for the specific types of work you do. Start simple, brainstorm some OHS protections you have learnt in other workplaces. Some good starting points could be:



Nothing should be obstructing your pathway on the ground.



Disposal systems for bio-hazardous items (e.g. used PPE, sharps etc.)



Record of supply inventory.



Memorise visual STI symptoms.



Perform visual health checks.




Check in with the Vixen team for support.



Read Scarlet Alliance's Red Book Online.





“Proactively addressing my general health safety as a private worker took me a while. Now I have people I can rely upon to help me out with driving, security and bookings.

I have only started doing this in the past 6 years, but taking steps like this would have been really helpful for my own safety from the start instead of throwing myself into the deep end. My attitude at the time was: “I don’t know where I will end up or where I am going”. But now I know, and my health and safety is in my own hands.”

Do your own OHS research for your specific needs, for the specific type of work you are doing, and share it with everyone you work with.

Good communication means you, your co-workers, and the people you rely upon all have the information and understanding, tips and knowledge to navigate a situation.

OHS includes having colleagues and places you can rely upon to gather resources easily. Buy plenty of affordable condoms, dental dams, sponges and/or the types of lube that are best for you and your service.

The Vixen team is one part of your OHS solutions. Networking with other sex workers who do similar work to you is another.

When sharing a workplace with other private sex workers, whether friends or colleagues, OHS is a give and take process. ***Try to understand each other's needs***, talk and discuss.

"I have a friend on every street, in every hotel. Working as a pair, we support our health and safety. We save costs working in the same room at a hotel. Not only are we saving money, we support each other as friends. There are many benefits to working together."



OHS for private/independent workers & collectives

Independent/Private Workers | Risk Management

01 | Identify

Working alone, running a sole sex worker business.

02 | Assess

Isolation, burnout, unmet needs in a crisis.

05 | Record

Keep records of supply inventory, cleaning and maintenance processes, relevant client info and emergency procedures.



04 | Review

Checking in via Vixen workshops, events, and other skill-sharing opportunities. How long has it been since you last attended an online or in-person event? Is your membership to the local sex worker organisation up to date? Do you feel comfortable with your work practices, set-up and arrangements?

03 | Control

Networking, skill-sharing and other methods of maintaining connection to community.

“It is good, working privately. I feel safe because my location is in a good area. At my apartment I have CCTV with two cameras. I get to see my customers first, their full face before I let them up into the complex. Sometimes they will tell me via SMS “I am here,” but I can see on the camera when no one is there!”

“I used to work sharing with other workers, there was no issues. We had dinner in the kitchen and cleaned up our mess. We cleaned our working room after each job, even when we had our own rooms, mostly to keep things sweet and smooth among us all.”





“I am lucky to have someone there with me when I do private work, it’s been a life changer.”

What are your *OHS standards?*

What are the OHS standards important to your workplace? The next few pages are left blank for you to fill in your own information.



What are your OHS standards?



01 | Identify



05 | Record

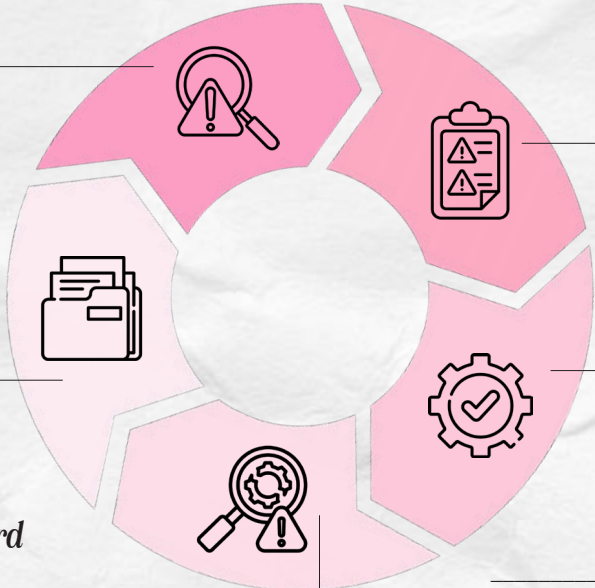
03 | Control

04 | Review



What are your OHS standards?

01 | Identify



05 | Record

03 | Control

04 | Review

01 | Identify



05 | Record

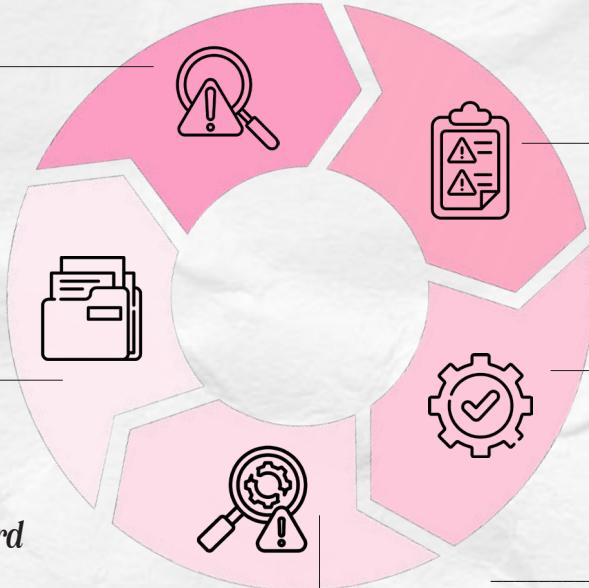
03 | Control

04 | Review



What are your OHS standards?

01 | Identify

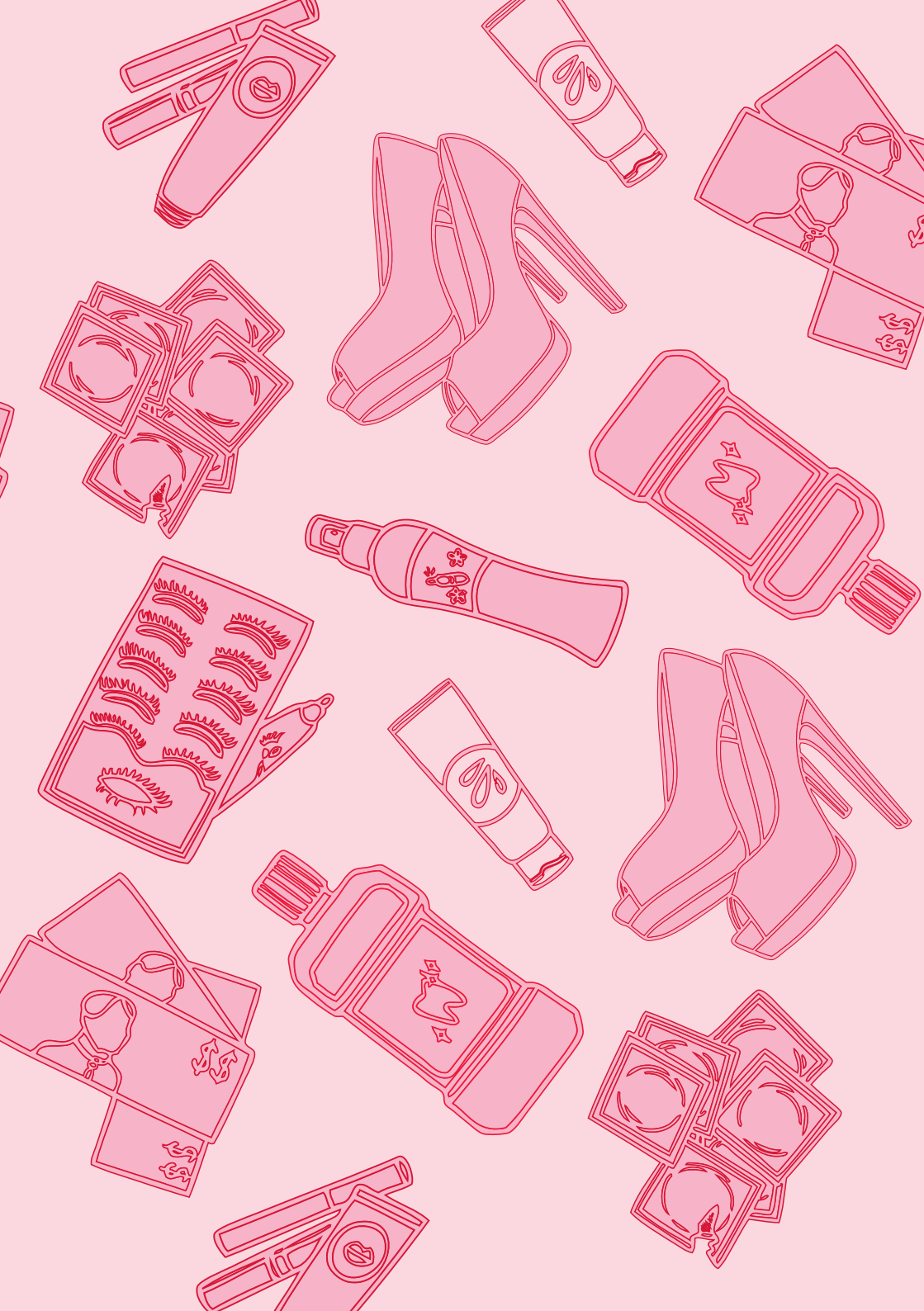


05 | Record

03 | Control

04 | Review







SEX WORK *is work*

Vixen is Victoria's peer-only sex worker organisation, proudly run 100% by and for sex workers.



vixen.org.au



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The Vixen 'Sex Work Is Work' resources are supported by the Victorian Government.

