



turn a frown upside down

Guidelines on Confidentiality

Confidential information is that which is regarded as 'personal'. It is information which is told to an individual, or a group of people, and is not meant for public or general knowledge. It is the duty of staff / volunteers not to reveal to any other person, outside the specifically expressed person(s) within the organisation, any matter which becomes known to the individual via their involvement with the organisation. This includes information which may be traced back to the individual by identifying them or anyone else involved with them.

'*Personal Information*' is that which is defined by the individual, but should always include my status, name, address, sexual orientation, personal lifestyle and relationship and financial situation.

Befriend A Child upholds the rights of the clients to receive a professional, supportive and appropriate response to their requests, and believes that a policy of confidentiality is integral to achieving this aim. It should also be accepted that it may be necessary to over-ride this policy in the event of legal proceedings or child abuse.

Guidelines

- Volunteers have a considerable amount of contact with service users and so will be aware of confidential information. These guidelines are not exclusive, but provide a checklist of some of the situations where confidentiality could be put at risk. Any breach of confidentiality will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.
- It is important for volunteers, where possible, to be clear about their limits with clients, so that they are not placed in a position where they are hearing information they would prefer not to hear, or feel that they are not able to keep within the boundaries of confidentiality.
- Information about another person, even if presented in a way to protect the individual's confidentiality, can be both misinterpreted and identifiable. Informal chatting with colleagues from other agencies or organisations can lead to confidentiality being broken, due to the fact that the client may be common to both parties and both parties are bound by confidentiality.
- Often volunteers may feel that a close friend can be trusted and may be a form of support. It is a habit to be discouraged and volunteers should refer back to 'definition'. Remember that no matter how close or concerned, friends do not have the right to confidential information about the organisation.
- It is likely that it will be the natural progression to discuss any event that takes place while volunteering with a partner. It must be remembered that your partner is the same as any other person in terms of confidentiality. If a volunteer is struggling with either of the above, they must seek the support of staff immediately.
- Relaxing in a social environment and drinking can lead to disclosure of information. Volunteers must be aware that they do not know who may

be within earshot, even if you are with another representative of Befriend A Child.

- If Befriend A Child has to call you at work, please ensure that no mention of names is made within the earshot of colleagues, or information written down within view.
- Volunteers should not leave notes of clients' information in view of any other person nor discuss clients on the 'phone within earshot of another.
- If you meet a client in the street, you may break their confidence by acknowledging them. Let that person make the decision to recognise you or not.
- Volunteers should never become involved in conversations with clients about other clients. Any information revealed to a volunteer about another client should be reported to the office.
- When visiting, driving or picking up a client, volunteers may see and speak with relatives, friends or others associated with clients. Volunteers should not discuss the client with these people, when information is being offered. Befriend A Child will try to ensure at all times 'who knows what' in these situations and direct the volunteer accordingly.
- Volunteers should not offer personal information to clients about themselves or about colleagues or the agency. 'Personal confidences' cannot be guaranteed in this situation.
- Volunteers 'phoning clients from their own home should dial 141 first.
- In the event of a volunteer having to take a client who is unconscious to the hospital, volunteers do not have the right to reveal the HIV status of that client. (The office does have written authorisation from those clients who do wish emergency services to be told, but volunteers MUST check this with the office first.)
- If a volunteer has an accident while with a client that involves spillage of blood, it is acceptable to say to a GP or attending hospital staff that the volunteer "...Has reason to believe that he/she has been in contact with someone who is HIV+ ". All medical staff are bound by confidentiality.
- Volunteers are bound by the terms of their contract on confidentiality on leaving Befriend A Child. Failure to adhere to this is likely to result in Befriend A Child taking appropriate legal action.