



CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Safeline – CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

| CONTENTS: | | Page No. |
|------------------|--|-----------------|
| | | 02 |
| 1.0 | Guiding Principles | 03 |
| 2.0 | Limits of Confidentiality | 03 |
| 3.0 | Information to Outside Bodies | 04 |
| 4.0 | Sharing Information within Safeline | 04 |
| 5.0 | Employment Practice Relating to Confidentiality | 04 |
| 6.0 | Recording, Storing and transmission of Data | 05 |
| 7.0 | Breaching of Confidentiality | 05 |
| 8.0 | Information for Research, Publicity, Planning | 06 |
| 9.0 | Summary Statement for Clients | 06 |
| 10.0 | Monitoring and Review | 07 |
| 11.0 | Links to Other Policies and Procedures | 07 |

1. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Safeline recognises that confidentiality is of the utmost importance, for all those who receive its service.

CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

This policy is based on the principle that the clients' interests, wishes and rights are of fundamental importance. A client who accesses Safeline's services has the right to be confident that:

- Information given by the client will only be used for the purpose for which it was disclosed, and will not be shared with anyone, either inside or outside of Safeline, without their expressed consent.
- Clients will be made aware of the reasons for the disclosure of information, the information disclosed and who will receive it.
- In any one situation where a client does not give written consent to disclose, information will not be shared with a third party unless the circumstances are exceptional.
- All documentation relating to clients is stored securely and protected in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.
- Any documentation relating to clients that is stored electronically is held securely

STAFF, VOLUNTEER AND STUDENT CONFIDENTIALITY

In addition, the interests, wishes and rights of Safeline students/volunteers/staff/trustees are also of great importance. Whilst acknowledging that maximum learning is achieved in an environment of openness and honesty between staff, volunteers and students, personal and sensitive information disclosed to a Line Manager about a client(s) or about themselves, should be treated as confidential and stored safely under lock and key, if in written form. The Line Manager should give due consideration as to whether personal and sensitive information needs to be captured at all and must be able to justify the

relevance and necessity of capturing such information. Disclosure to others should only be made subsequently with an explanation of the reasons for disclosure, the exact information to be passed on and who will receive it. Clients, staff, volunteers, students and trustees are to be fully aware of the existence of this policy and their rights and responsibilities within it.

2. **LIMITS OF CONFIDENTIALITY**

There are circumstances where information about clients is shared within the charity. Information shared is confidential to the client and counsellor. All Safeline staff, contract workers and volunteers are bound by confidentiality.

- In addition to the services provided to clients Safeline aims to provide a caring/learning environment for staff, volunteers, students, trustees and clients.
- Clients have a right to refuse the involvement of students in their support.

There are four main exceptions to the requirements to maintain client confidentiality which will be agreed with clients when they access Safeline services via the client assessment process:

- the client has given permission for Safeline to share the information
- the information is requested by a court of law
- there is serious risk of harm to another person, for example, a serious crime being committed such as terrorism, fraud, or where there are risks to children as defined by the Child Protection Act.
- there is serious risk of harm to the client, for example, serious suicidal thoughts or dangerous self harming activities.

3. **POLICY PROVIDING INFORMATION TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

Apart from the exceptions to confidentiality above, client information must not be shared with a third party without the specific consent of the client in writing.

When an enquiry is received from a partner, relative or friend of the client, no information of any kind will be imparted without the client's express permission.

Clients who request contact with other organisations

This will be regarded as a situation where the client has given consent. However it is still necessary that the client is clear as to how much information is given and to whom. They must also give written permission for this to be shared.

4. **POLICY OF SHARING INFORMATION WITHIN SAFELINE**

In Safeline, counsellors, staff, volunteers, students and trustees work together to facilitate support and learning. All these individuals receive training regarding confidentiality at their induction.

It is important that all Safeline staff and volunteers have a clear understanding of how the principles of confidentiality are embodied in practice. Safeline take all responsible practical steps through the training and instruction and ongoing management supervision of all personnel.

5. **EMPLOYMENT PRACTICE RELATING TO THE CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY**

A Confidentiality Policy is fundamental to the effective and successful running of Safeline. It is therefore essential that all staff, volunteers, students, trustees and clients understand and support this Confidentiality Policy, and are aware of any limits to Safeline's policy on confidentiality.

Safeline will therefore ensure that:

- Staff and volunteers are properly qualified, trained and competent to receive confidential information and deal with the issues that are raised.
- Staff induction involves familiarisation with this Confidentiality Policy.
- Staff receive support in its implementation throughout their employment with the organisation.

This will involve instruction in areas such as:

- Details of Safeline's policy
- Communicating the policy to clients
- Safe storage of data (both paper and computer records)
- Procedures for note taking
- Dealing with telephone enquiries
- Procedures for breach of Confidentiality

Staff are required not to discuss clients outside of Safeline unless with their Clinical Supervisor when client work must be anonymised, or otherwise act in a manner which threatens an individual's confidentiality. Within Safeline, all discussion of clients should be purposeful and sensitive.

6. **RECORDING AND STORAGE OF DATA Data Relating to Clients**

- a) The scope and extent of information in client records will be discussed at the outset of services.
- b) Records/case notes should be brief and only contain information that is relevant. They should not contain the writer's opinion or diagnoses.
- c) The client file must be anonymous. All identifying information must be removed or blanked out.
- d) Client files must not be removed from the office (unless in a lockable storage case), or left out on desks, posted (unless signed for on receipt)
- e) Client details must not be left visible on paper in the office, for example; on the photocopier or notes on post- its.
- f) All mobile phones and computer systems must be password protected.
- g) All messages, e-mails and phone messages, must be deleted once dealt with.

Clients Access to Files

All clients have a right to access their own records in accordance with relevant legislation including:

The General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (GDPR)
The Access to Personal Files Act 1988
The Access to Health Records 1990

In some situations, the legislation permits a client's access to records to be restricted.

- Certain information may be held in a client's record which concerns, or which has been provided by a third party. The client will not have automatic access to this part of the file without permission from the third party.
- Access will be withheld if providing access to it would not be in the client's best interests - as determined by the Data Protection Officer.

Storage of Data

- Recorded information, either in paper form or computer data, will be held in secure and confidential storage. The obligations imposed by GDPR will always be adhered to.
- Movement of confidential information outside physical areas in which it is safeguarded will be avoided as far as possible.
- Records will be retained for a maximum period of 7 years after the last client contact, after which they will be confidentially destroyed. Clients must be informed of this when initial access to services is made.

Transmission of Data

- When data is transmitted as part of the therapeutic or emotional support process, for example, in online or telephone counselling or in Helpline and Online Support work, Safeline will seek the clients Informed Consent about the methods of communication used and the limits of security of each.
- As far as possible, clients will be encouraged to access the services using secure encrypted methods, such as the PlusGuidance portal.

7. BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY Procedures

If it appears that Confidentiality will have to be breached the counsellor will make every effort to discuss the situation with the client thus encouraging the client to take responsibility for contacting the relevant authorities. Should the client decide to disclose the required information, then no breach of confidentiality will have taken place.

If the client is unwilling to take action, the client's counsellor should consult with his/her Line Manager.

Any breach will be minimised by restricting the information conveyed to that which is relevant to the immediate situation.

A careful note should be made of circumstances as part of case records. The note must show:

- The extent of the disclosure
- To whom it was made and when
- The reason for the disclosure
- Who was consulted beforehand
- Whether the client was informed, and if so how and when

If the person receiving the information agrees to conditions about how it should be used, a note should also be made of this in the client's file.

Unintentional breaches in confidentiality must be reported immediately to the Data Protection Officer. See the Data Protection Policy for further details on breaches of confidentiality.

Procedures for clients who feel rights have been breached

- If a client feels that his/her right to confidentiality was not respected by Safeline then s/he has a right to invoke the Complaints Procedure of Safeline. S/he may also be able to take legal action.
- Clients who wish to complain about a possible breach of confidentiality, or to pursue the matter legally, should not feel that this puts at risk the service that Safeline is offering.

8. USE OF INFORMATION OF RESEARCHING, PUBLICITY AND PLANNING

Clients will not be the subject of research or have information about them or photographs of them used in publicity material without their consent.

Any approach to the client, via Safeline, by researchers or media representatives will be treated with the utmost caution. No personal details concerning the client will be disclosed by Safeline. Safeline has a policy of not passing on such requests from third parties to clients accessing its services.

Where information about specific clients is used for publication in appropriate journals, this will be with the client's permission and willingness to participate and with his/her anonymity preserved.

Any information which may be used for planning purposes by Safeline will be presented statistically, or in aggregated form, thus ensuring that individuals are not identifiable and preserving confidentiality.

9. SUMMARY STATEMENT FOR CLIENTS

Throughout Safeline we recognise that confidentiality is of great importance to clients. Because of this, you have the right to be confident that:

- Information that you have given us will not be shared routinely with anyone outside Safeline without your permission. Information shared internally will be for specific reasons only i.e. for administration purposes and will be kept to an absolute minimum. Your file will be anonymous and kept securely.
- If you decide that it is helpful to you to have information passed outside of Safeline, for example to your GP, your counsellor will check with you that you are happy with the type and amount of information to be passed on.

10.0 Monitoring and Review

It is important to monitor and review the effectiveness of this policy to determine that it is being operated effectively and whether there are any aspects where improvements might be made. This policy will be reviewed annually unless a need arises to do so earlier.

11.0 Links with Other Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Safeline Policies and Procedures, copies of which are available via line managers and heads of section from the Policy and Procedure File held on the Safeline shared drive:

- Data Protection Policy
- ICT Policy
- Volunteers Policy
- Safeguarding - Child Protection Policy
- Safeguarding - Adult At Risk Policy
- Suicide Risk Policy
- Client/Counsellor Agreement
- Counsellor/Safeline Agreement