

Supporting Heroes In mental health Foundational Training (SHIFT)

Confidentiality Guidelines

A guide to support and advise anyone who works, or hopes to work, within the counseling environment.



This guide explains how confidentiality and data protection is applied in counseling and outlines the 'exceptions'- the situations in which confidentiality cannot necessarily be maintained.

This guide provides some basic advice relating to confidentiality and disclosure, however all mental health professionals should work to the disclosure process of their professional body, while all agencies employing mental health professionals should make themselves aware of the disclosure process used by that mental health provider.

Individuals attending a counseling session should always be informed of the boundaries of confidentiality prior to the session taking place.

- The counselor should not inform friends, family, or supervisors of an individual's attendance without the individual's permission.
- Any notes taken should be treated as health records and should be kept locked and secured.
- All counseling provided should remain confidential unless falling within the following exceptions.

Exceptions

There may be occasions when the counselor cannot maintain absolute confidentiality. Wherever possible the counselor should discuss the reasons for this with the individual before passing on any information.

The exceptions include:

- Where the counselor has express consent –that is the individual's written or verbal permission to disclose information. For example on occasion it may be appropriate for the counselor to contact a third party- such as a general practitioner on behalf of the individual.
- Where refusal to disclose would make the counselor liable to civil or criminal court proceedings

- Where the counselor discusses their work with a counseling supervisor in keeping with their professional requirements. In these discussions both supervisors and counselors also abide by confidentiality codes, and the individual's name should not be disclosed.
- Where there is serious risk of harm or danger to the individual or others. In these circumstances, the counselor should initially encourage the individual to contact the relevant person or support agency. If that's unlikely to happen, then the counselor should make every effort to discuss it with the individual before passing information on directly. The counselor should first attempt to gain written consent wherever possible. However, if the danger is sufficiently acute, then it may not be possible to gain consent beforehand.

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For more information and training dates see: <http://SHIFTWellness.org>

SHIFT for Individuals Exposed to Child Pornography: This three-hour course team taught by a mental health professional and a law enforcement officer will offer professionals who are exposed to child pornography, and who may be required to interact with pedophiles on a regular basis, the opportunity to learn about the causes and symptoms of negative effects that may occur as a result of their duties. Participants will learn how to develop effective coping strategies. In addition the exposed individual will be given the tools to help facilitate a supportive work environment for themselves, effectively understand and utilize mental health support, and solicit support through and for their families and their peers.

SHIFT for Mental Health Professionals: This four-hour workshop team taught by a mental health professional and a law enforcement officer will offer mental health professionals insight into the challenges faced by professionals exposed to child pornography and other operations involving pedophiles. The course will cover how to help these professionals avoid vicarious traumatization, burnout and compassion fatigue. In addition, mental health professionals will learn how to gain the trust of criminal justice professionals, which techniques show promise in reducing the negative effects of exposure, and how they can help individuals build resiliency and balance in this very challenging field. This course offers not just education, but also tools that the mental health provider can immediately implement to assist frontline heroes in maintaining positive mental health.

SHIFT Train the Trainer: For those wishing to teach the course locally.