

Briefing Paper: Confidentiality Policy

*Crisis Centre
Ministries*

Introduction

We can only help our clients if they trust us. Amongst other things, this means they need to trust us to use the things they say in a sensitive and appropriate way. Our confidentiality policy describes the principles we should follow, and how they work out in practice.

1. *Language*

These are some of the important words we use in this document.

Confidentiality: this is not the same as total secrecy. We cannot promise total secrecy to anyone because we want to help our clients, and we must protect our staff and volunteers, and also keep the law.

Client: someone we are helping. This will normally be someone who comes to CCM looking for help, but the same rules apply if the client happens to be working as a volunteer or member of staff: everybody is entitled to the same level of care.

Helper: someone on the CCM team, either a member of staff or a volunteer, who is trying to help a client in some way.

Manager: the person who is directly responsible for the helper. This could be, for example, the Duty Manager in the Coffee Shop, or a member of staff. The manager is bound by the same confidentiality policy as the helper.

2. *Our Confidentiality Policy*

Anything I learn from you is confidential. In normal circumstances, I will not tell anyone else what I have learned from you without your permission. But it is possible I may need to tell my manager about something you tell me.

You will probably be more concerned about some things you tell us, and less concerned about other things. For example, you are probably less concerned about people knowing where you grew up, and more concerned about them knowing your criminal record.

It is not always clear how people feel about different things. For example, some people do not want anyone else to know about their various debts, while others are quite relaxed about who knows this. We will do our best to understand how you regard each piece of information you give us. Please help us understand your feelings in this matter.

3. *Types of Information*

We distinguish between three main types of information. To keep things simple, we refer to them here as *personal*, *private* and *confidential*.

a. Personal details

Personal details are the facts that a stranger might know about you. For example, they can see you are in the coffee shop, whether you are a man or a woman and what you are wearing. They can make a fair guess at your height, weight and rough age.

Personal details will be shared within the team here. It is helpful for us to know who has been in, especially if one of the team has been trying to help you.

In general, we will not share your personal details with people outside the team. We will not normally tell the police, or anyone in the shop, if you have been in, or when you are expected to come back.

If there is a good reason, we will share this information with other organisations working to help you. For example, if the Salvation Army is trying to get in touch with you because they want to offer you a place in the detox unit, we will tell them if you are using our facilities and try to pass on a message for you. We would only do this if we know the organisation, and if they have a confidentiality policy like ours.

b. Private details

Private details are the facts we cannot know unless you tell us. Examples of private details are your place and date of birth, your address if you have one, where you slept last night, whether you are married, and details about any children you may have.

In general, we will only share your private details when this will help you, and then only with your helper, or (in your helper's absence) with their manager. For example, they may need to know about your children in order to help you find somewhere suitable to live.

c. Confidential details

Confidential details are the facts that you will not want people to know unless there is no alternative. Examples include your criminal record, mental health problems and details of the violence or abuse you have suffered in the past.

We will only tell people confidential details when necessary, and will do our best to ensure that nobody will learn any confidential details by accident.

4. Examples

If your helper is not sure what to do, or whether anything can be done, they will talk with their manager. Only the relevant details will be mentioned.

Your helper may need to talk with someone to help them cope with what they have heard. If this happens, they will probably describe what you told them, but will not identify you as the person who said it.

If we discover that someone could be at risk, we have an obligation to reduce the risk when this is possible. If you tell us about a criminal offence, we may have an obligation to report this to the police. In either case, a senior member of the team will be told what you said, and they will decide what to do.