

Ethics and Confidentiality

The crime victims you serve as a volunteer need not only your assistance but also your commitment to protect their rights and your respect for their individuality.

As a Good Samaritans volunteer, you are likely to encounter people from all walks of life and from different value systems, cultures, and races.

Just as the Samaritan helped someone without regard for his particular circumstances, you, as a Good Samaritans volunteer, must also commit to helping others regardless of their different lifestyles or value systems.

Consider these important concepts—

1. Victim information is protected by the principles of—

- **Privacy.** The right of persons to choose what others may know about them and under what circumstances.
- **Confidentiality.** The professional and ethical obligation to respect a victim's right to control personal information and access to it.
- **Privileged communication.** Generally, “privileged” applies to ministers, attorneys, and physicians, not volunteers or paraprofessionals. In other words, it is possible that Good Samaritans volunteers can be subpoenaed as witnesses in court cases.

2. Ethical principles of confidentiality include—

- **Respect for the victim's autonomy.** Victims are capable of controlling various aspects of their lives and the secrets they hold.
- **Respect for human relationships.** Relationships include aspects of intimacy.
- **Allegiance to a pledge of silence.** The pledge is made when confidentiality is extended. The pledge is binding in word and deed.
- **Usefulness in creating emotional safety in the helping relationship.** Without a sense of emotional safety, some victims will delay or forgo help.

3. Exceptions to confidentiality

A legal expert may be used for this section of the training. Refer to your state's specific laws. Exceptions include the following:

- Mandatory reporting of abuse or neglect of a child, elder, or incapacitated person.
- Threat of harm to one's self or the threat of harm or injury to another person.

- On the specific order of a judge.

4. Danger zones

- Discussing cases
- Confiding in friends or family
- Discussing victim information with outside agency personnel without victim's permission
- Discussing a case with the victim's family and friends
- Unapproved access to paperwork
- Cellular or cordless telephone conversations
- Law enforcement and criminal justice personnel's inquiries
- News media inquiries
- Casual conversations with other advocates in public places

5. Components of ethical decisionmaking

- Morals
- Values
- Virtues
- Sense of right and wrong
- Cultural values
- Societal values
- Individual values
- Religious values

6. Examples of ethical transgressions and criminal acts

- Lack of cultural sensitivity
- Not keeping commitments
- Being judgmental
- Lack of respect for victim
- Sexual exploitation
- Giving false or misleading information
- Accepting gifts or money for services
- Bartering for services
- Working beyond scope of training and qualifications
- Counseling friends or relatives
- Not reporting child abuse
- Inadequate or inaccurate documentation
- Falsifying records
- Allowing personal problems to interfere with job performance