

## **Code of Ethics: Victim Counselors**

### **I. Victim Counselors have an ethical responsibility to adults and children who seek their assistance.**

A. Victim Counselors will be competent.

1. Victim Counselors will have knowledge of the field of domestic violence and/or sexual abuse experience and the skills to apply the knowledge.
2. Victim Counselors will constantly update their knowledge and skills.
3. Victim Counselors will not operate outside the limits of their competence, but make referrals or consultations in those areas. Advocates will seek advice and counsel from colleagues and supervisors whenever such consultation is in the best interest of clients.
4. Victim Counselors will understand how many cultural and social norms lead to and condone domestic violence/sexual abuse and how those norms impact the individual.

B. Victim Counselors will apprise clients of the following:

1. The array of services offered by the program;
2. The qualifications of Victim Counselors;
3. The expectations of the domestic abuse and/or sexual abuse project;
4. The grievance procedure;
5. The obligation to report child abuse to the Department of Human Services;
6. The limits of confidentiality.

C. Victim Counselors will protect the client's confidentiality within clearly defined limits. These limits will be explained to all clients as follows:

1. Informed, specific consent may be given to the Victim Counselors by the client to obtain services for the client from other service providers.
2. The client will be informed that confidentiality cannot be maintained in the following situations:
  - a. When a dependent adult or child has been abused, exploited or neglected.
  - b. When the client's life may be endangered and she/he cannot give consent.
  - c. When the client makes a probable threat or is violent against another person.
3. The client will be informed that confidentiality may not be maintained when a court issues a court order for specific information.
4. The Victim Counselor will consider the potential for harm to a client when releasing information even with informed consent, and consult with a Certified Domestic Abuse or Sexual Abuse Advocate.
5. A client will be given the option to remain anonymous within certain limitations, such as, a crisis call or support group member.
6. The client has the right to refuse all or part of services to protect her/his anonymity.

D. Victim Counselors will delineate between work and social relationships and will be aware of the inherent privilege and power differences. The Advocate will never exploit relationships with clients for personal advantage.

1. Prior and/or present social or business relationships with clients require special consideration. The Advocate will, whenever possible, refer these clients to another service provider within the project or the nearest sister project.
2. Because victimization may be a long-term issue, creating personal friendships between an Advocate and a client after receiving services is always inappropriate.
3. Provision of services to persons related by consanguinity or affinity, within the third degree is prohibited.
4. Sexual/romantic relationships with current or former clients is prohibited and is also a crime under Iowa Code Chapter 709.15. (See Appendix E of the Certification manual)

E. Victim Counselors will work to increase victim safety; will respect the authority and autonomy of the adult victim to direct her own life; and will hold the perpetrator, not the victim, responsible for the abusive behavior and for stopping the abuse.

1. Victim Counselors will treat the client with respect and honesty in both verbal and nonverbal communication.
2. Victim Counselors will share knowledge they have with clients as it pertains to the client's situation. This may include but is not limited to the dynamics of domestic violence, sexual abuse, lethality issues, safety planning, effects on children, and the social and political issues that contribute to the continuance of sexual abuse and/or domestic violence.
3. Victim Counselors will accept what a client tells them about the abuse.
4. Victim Counselors should withdraw services precipitously only under unusual circumstances, giving careful consideration to all factors in the situation and taking care to minimize possible adverse effects.
5. Victim Counselors who anticipate termination or interruption of service to clients, should notify those individuals promptly and seek the transfer, referral, or termination of service in relation to the client's needs and preferences.

F. Victim Counselors will fairly distribute time, goods and services among all clients. Advocates will not practice, condone, facilitate or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, age, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, political beliefs, marital status, mental or physical disability, economic or any other discriminatory basis.

1. Victim Counselors will have knowledge of and respect for cultural backgrounds.
2. Victim Counselors will be knowledgeable and accommodating of disabling conditions.
3. Should one client's needs conflict with another client's needs, Victim Counselors will act with regard to one client only after promptly referring the other to another qualified service provider.

G. Victim Counselors will assess clients to determine the nature of the abuse, the extent of the abuse and the safety needs of the client. Victim Counselors will do nothing to increase the danger to or harm the client.

H. Victim Counselors will be aware of and communicate to the client the historical basis for abuse. They will acknowledge that abuse occurs when there is an imbalance of power and that this situation is maintained and reinforced by our culture.

## **II. The Victim Counselor has an Ethical Responsibility to keep records.**

- A. Victim Counselors will keep records documenting services provided as mandated by funders in accordance with state and federal guidelines.
- B. Victim Counselors will record statistical and factual information, not opinions, speculations, on conclusions.
- C. Victim Counselors will allow clients access to their own records.

## **III. Victim Counselors have an ethical responsibility to themselves.**

- A. Victim Counselors with education, training and experience have the right to be called professionals and to be treated professionally.
- B. Victim Counselors have an obligation to join with other professionals to promote and support recognition and fair treatment of the profession.
- C. Victim Counselors will see to their own empowerment and nurturing.
- D. Victim Counselors will recognize when personal circumstances may compromise professional abilities, performance, or judgment and will take steps to resolve those issues.
- E. Victim Counselors will avoid relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of victims/survivors.

## **IV. Victim Counselors have an ethical responsibility to employers and colleagues.**

- A. Victim Counselors will adhere to the policies and procedures of their employers.
- B. Victim Counselors will treat colleagues with respect, fairness and courtesy.
- C. Victim Counselors should not assume professional responsibility for the clients of another agency or a colleague without appropriate communication with that agency or colleague within the bounds required by confidentiality.
- D. Victim Counselors must clearly distinguish in public statements their personal views from positions adopted by organizations for which they work or are members.
- E. Victim Counselors will report to competent authority any conflict of interest that prevents themselves or a colleague from being able to provide ethical services, work cooperatively with colleagues or allied professionals, or be impartial in the treatment of any client.
- F. Victim Counselors will report violations of the Code of Ethics by fellow Victim Counselors to the Certification Committee in a timely manner.

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