

CONFIDENTIALITY FOR STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

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As a volunteer working with members of the public, it is important that you understand confidentiality. In general, you should not share information (such as names of clients, or information they may have told you) with anyone who does not need to know – and certainly with no one outside of the project.

PASSING ON INFORMATION

As a volunteer you might become party to information that you feel demands some form of action. This might be about an accident, a complaint, an allegation of abuse, or something else which you feel you need to share with another person. This might be from a client, another volunteer, committee member or staff member.

Do:

- Stay calm.
- Listen to what is being said.
- Give time to the complainant to say what they wish without interrupting.
- Avoid asking leading questions (for example, ‘you were scared, weren’t you?’).
- Ask open questions (for example, ‘How did that make you feel?’).
- Briefly summarise what they’ve told you to check that you’ve understood correctly.
- Reassure them that they have done the right thing in coming forward.
- Let them know that you’ll have to pass this on to someone more senior. Tell them who this person is.
- Record in writing the allegation as soon as possible – ensure your record is truthful without speculation.
- Report the allegation to your supervisor, or if you think this is not appropriate, to someone more senior within the organisation.

Don’t:

- Panic.
- Promise to keep secrets which might hinder the effective follow up of the allegation.
- Enquire unnecessarily into the details of the incident.
- Make the complainant repeat the story unnecessarily.

Different situations will call for different responses – the action your project might take over a report of an accident, like a broken leg, will be different from that they will take over a report of abuse. The person who you report the incident to should tell you what he/she plans to do next.

Remember that at any stage you can speak to a staff member at the Volunteering Service for advice and support.

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