

# Nebraska's Network of Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Programs Ethical Guidelines

## Purpose

The Ethical Guidelines set forth in this document are intended to provide guidance for staff, volunteers, and board members (hereafter referred to as advocates) of Nebraska's domestic violence sexual assault programs. The primary goal of the Ethical Guidelines is to protect individuals served by Nebraska's network of domestic violence sexual assault programs and the integrity of the network as a whole. It is the responsibility of the programs and their advocates to strive to uphold the ethical standards of the network in their work with victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

The guidelines are separated into four major categories. Each category contains guidelines for ethical practices for staff, volunteers, and board members.

## Competency

- Advocates strive to maintain high levels of competency in the fields of domestic violence and sexual assault.
- Advocates complete education requirements as set forth in the *Program Standards Manual*.
- Advocates provide only services for which they have received education and training.
- When additional issues, such as substance abuse or severe mental illness significantly affect the program's ability to provide competent services to a client, the program must obtain training, consultation, and experience to ensure that competent services are provided or they must make an appropriate referral.

## Client Welfare

- Advocates respect the client's right to privacy, confidentiality, safety, and to make her own choices.
- Advocates do not knowingly participate in or condone unfair discriminatory practices.
- In their work with clients, advocates do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, or socioeconomic status.

- Advocates understand and are aware of real and perceived power differences between themselves and their clients and do not exploit this during or after their contact with a client.
- Advocates are aware of the possible problems that may result from dual relationships with clients.
- Advocates are aware that conflict of interest and inequality of power in a relationship may still be present after the professional relationship has ended.
- Advocates do not withhold information from our clients at the request of other agencies, unless the information falls under Section III of the Confidentiality Guidelines adopted by the network. (“Limitations to Confidentiality: Releasing Information Without Consent”).
- Advocates respect the rights of clients to make their own decisions and will assist clients in considering the consequences of their choices.
- Advocates are respectful of the experience of survivors and recognize them as a valuable resource.

## Conduct

- Advocates strive to be aware of their personal beliefs, values, limitations, and biases in their work with clients.
- Advocates adapt their services and methods to meet the needs of special populations to the extent that the program is capable of responding to those needs.
- Advocates consult with other coalition members as necessary to prevent or avoid unethical conduct.
- Advocates respect the right of others to hold different opinions, beliefs, and attitudes than their own.
- Advocates do not knowingly participate in any behavior that is demeaning or harassing to clients or coworkers.
- Advocates do not engage in sexual harassment of clients or coworkers. Sexual harassment is defined as sexual solicitation, physical advances, or verbal or nonverbal communication that is sexual in nature, occurs during the advocate’s role as an advocate and is either offensive, unwelcome, or creates a hostile workplace, and the advocate knows or is told this.

- Advocates take necessary steps to care for themselves when they become aware of personal problems potentially interfering with their work.
- Advocates comply with local, state, and federal laws.
- Advocates consider the best interests of clients in policy development at all levels.
- Advocates have an obligation to provide information to clients that is sufficient to enable them to give informed consent, and that is in the best interest of the client's welfare.
- Advocates do not disclose the location of shelters, safe homes, or other safe havens for clients to those not approved by the program.

## Confidentiality

- Advocates discuss confidentiality and its limitations with clients at the outset of the client's participation in their program.
- Advocates take reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of their clients.
- Advocates disclose confidential client information only in accordance with the *Confidentiality Guidelines for Nebraska's Network of Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Programs*.
- When confidential client information is to be entered into databases or systems of records available to people outside the network, the information must be disguised or coded to prevent identification of the client.
- Advocates record information necessary to meet program, funding, and liability requirements when documenting identifying information about a client.

Updated: 2/5/03