



Path: Confidentiality Policy

Confidentiality entails protecting people's privacy, ensuring that information about anyone is not shared other than in specific circumstances. Within a service-providing organisation it ensures any information regarding clients or staff is only shared when strictly relevant, necessary and appropriate.

At Path, confidentiality operates under strict rules.

This means any information relating to:

1. the affairs of the agency;
2. clients who use the services of the agency;
3. staff of the agency;
4. visitors to the agency's premises;

is **strictly confidential**.

Therefore no information may be disclosed to anyone outside the agency without the person whom the information concerns freely giving their prior consent or without due reason (see below).

Particularly, information regarding anyone's:

- housing or health status;
- sexuality or sexual orientation;
- name, address or telephone number;
- political, religious or social affiliations;
- employment or financial status;

may not be mentioned off Path premises or to anyone not a member of Path without the individual's free and prior consent.

Further, when information is passed within the agency it will be only to those for whom that information is necessary and relevant in terms of service provision or supervision. ie Workers may freely refer to client issues within line management relationships as part of being supervised and supported.

When a worker supporting a client needs to liaise with another professional, though, the situation is to always be explained to the client beforehand, the client then, if willing, signing a standard disclosure / consent form.

The only exceptions to the above are when the issue of harm to self or others arises or where there may be another legal obligation to disclose, in which circumstances Path will act always within the law and aim to best protect and promote well-being. (This means that in certain circumstances it may be necessary for Path to alert the Police or Social Services to a particular issue.)

In order that **confidentiality** is maintained to the highest degree it is useful to cultivate the habit of not talking about anyone.

Any breach of confidentiality will result in an investigation and/or that person(s) being disciplined.

Confidentiality Guidance

I. Exceptions

Path offers **confidentiality** to **all**, unless:

- * there is an issue, which comes under child protection guidelines, in which case the child protection guidelines will apply, or where someone's safety is threatened.
- * a client gives specific agreement
- * requested by the courts. Similarly, where a warrant permits police officers to seize documents.
- * a service user commits or attempts to commit a criminal offence on Path premises or against a Path member of staff
- * a wkr is being used by the client to facilitate the commission of a crime or fraud
- * failure to reveal knowledge of an actual or intended offence, which could be construed as an act of terrorism under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, would make the worker guilty of an offence

i.e. Path may reveal confidential information if this is necessary to prevent the client or a third party committing a criminal act that Path believes on reasonable grounds is likely to result in bodily harm.

NB A possible breach of confidentiality must always be discussed by a worker with their line manager.

(See *other exceptions*)

2. Guidance re adhering to policy

- Do not discuss clients with outside agencies unless you have the client's permission to do so and you are absolutely sure who you are talking to and that it is necessary.
- It is important that relevant staff have access to all client information.
- Be careful of what is written on client's files. We must not make assumptions and need only record what is relevant to the client, this should be factual, non-judgemental and value-free.
- If you are unsure of what to write about a specific issue speak to a manager.
- Never discuss another client with or in front of other clients or non-Path personnel. Care also needs to be taken when using the phone or client records when other clients or non-Path personnel are near by.
- Clients should not be in the office, unless – as a rare exception, agreed with a manager - it is for a specific reason and they are accompanied by a member of staff.

- Clients should be allowed access to their own files through their worker and a manager.
- Do not divulge any staff member's home address or telephone number or whereabouts to anyone outside the agency.
- Members of staff have access to their own personnel files.
- Desks must be kept clear and any information pertaining to clients must be locked away when other non-Path staff members are using the offices.
- To ensure confidentiality **at all times** the service offered must be discreet in terms of sensitivity.
- Breaches of confidentiality may lead to disciplinary action.

NB Staff means paid or unpaid workers for Path.

See also: *Confidentiality policy; Data Protection policy.*

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