



Confidentiality – when and how to break it

Breaking confidentiality (telling someone else about information that has been disclosed to you) can be a grey area. So, it's important to have an agreed policy on how and when to break confidentiality.

Recommendations for when and how to break confidentiality

We suggest your policy enables you to break confidentiality if:

- There is immediate danger. If a person has clearly told you that they plan to take their life within the next 24 hours, or has already taken action which puts their life in danger, but does not want to seek support themselves and does not give their consent for you to do so – call 999.
- The person is physically present at your club or group and is experiencing a crisis. You should act immediately to get them support. This may involve contacting their emergency contact* or a mental health professional.
- The person is planning to take action that will put others at risk (for example, stepping in front of a train). We suggest calling 999.
- The person is under 18. In these situations, the young person's welfare should come first and we suggest contacting their emergency contact* and seeking support from 999.
- There is a safeguarding concern that may have a wider impact. For example, if someone alleges that they have been abused by a volunteer but asks you not to say anything. You would have to report this as it's in the public interest that it's investigated.
- There is a safeguarding issue that concerns a child. Follow your safeguarding policy for children and young people.
- If you think that the person is an adult at risk and they do not want you to make a safeguarding referral, still follow your safeguarding adults' process and discuss with your safeguarding lead or anonymously with your Safeguarding Adults Board or Partnership.

*Don't contact their emergency contact if the disclosure is linked to that person. Only contact their emergency contact if it is safe to do so.



Recommendations for when and how to break confidentiality

You should always discuss breaking confidentiality with the person, and encourage them to seek help and support. See the [Social Care Institute for Excellence's advice](#) on if a person does not want you to share their information.

If you need to break confidentiality and inform someone such as a medical professional, safeguarding adults' team or the person's emergency contact about your concerns without their consent, we recommend you do this with the support of a Welfare Officer, committee member or member of management.

There's a lot of uncertainty around breaking confidentiality and it's much better to make a decision with the support of a colleague or manager. It's important to continue to discuss this decision after it has been taken and to look out for the wellbeing of the staff or volunteer involved. We also recommend keeping confidential notes of discussions, reporting the incident if appropriate and logging any follow up.

