

CONFIDENTIALITY Guide for Church-Based Peer Support

OAKS MINISTRY COLLABORATIVE



What CONFIDENTIALITY IS

- **Holding in confidence personal information**, struggles, stories, or needs unless you have their consent or there is an urgent reason to disclose.
- **Letting the person decide** when, how, and with whom their story is shared; protecting their right to tell their own story.
- **Controlled, limited sharing** only with the smallest circle necessary for care or oversight (“need-to-know”) and ideally with the person’s permission.
- **Building trust and safety** to create space for honesty and growth because people believe their privacy will be respected.
- **Distinct from secrecy**. Secrecy hides information to maintain control, avoid accountability, or manipulate; confidentiality is ethically bounded privacy to protect and heal.

What CONFIDENTIALITY IS NOT

- **Absolute or unlimited**: it does not mean you promise never to tell anyone under any circumstances. Confidentiality can be overridden if there is imminent harm to self or others (e.g., suicide risk, violence) or serious unrepented sin that must be addressed biblically.
- **Professional privilege**: church relationships are family-like and mutual, not transactional. Confidentiality practices from the medical and mental health field and can guide us, but they are not legally binding the same way.
- **A cover for sin or abuse**: confidentiality must never be used to hide wrongdoing, protect reputations, or prevent proper accountability.
- **License to share without consent**: even with good intentions (sharing prayer requests, connecting people), it is still a breach if the person hasn’t agreed.
- **Gossip’s opposite**: gossip is sharing private information with people who are not part of the solution. Confidentiality means you refrain from that, but also don’t promise secrecy that keeps necessary help from being brought in.

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES for volunteers

- **Ask first before sharing someone’s story** – even for prayer or staff discussion. Use anonymity if needed.
- **Clarify limits to confidentiality up front** that you will keep things private except if someone is in danger or serious sin requires biblical confrontation.
- **Go directly to the person first when there’s a problem** (Matthew 18). Bring in leaders as needed and appropriate.
- **Differentiate between sin and preferences**. Not every disagreement is a breach-worthy issue.
- **Do with, not for**. Encourage people to speak and act for themselves when possible, so they grow in maturity and ownership.