

**Code of Ethics: Certified Sexual Assault Advocate – July 1, 2013**

**Sexual Assault Victim Counselor Code of Ethical Conduct**

**I. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors have an ethical responsibility to adults and youth who seek their assistance.**

**A. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will be competent.**

1. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors complete a standardized training to receive and maintain certification and will have both general and specific knowledge of the field of sexual assault. Additionally,
2. The designation of Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will only apply to those who currently work at or volunteer for an IowaCASA member program under supervision.
3. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will maintain up-to-date knowledge on services and skills for sexual assault services.<sup>+</sup>
4. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will not operate outside the limits of their competence, but make referrals or consultations in those areas. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will seek advice and counsel from colleagues and supervisors whenever such consultation is in the best interest of clients.
5. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will understand how cultural and social norms lead to and condone sexual violence and how those norms impact individuals.

**B. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will protect the client's confidentiality within clearly defined limits. These limits will be explained to all clients as follows:**

1. Written, informed, specific consent may be given by the client to the Sexual Assault Victim Counselor to obtain services on her or his behalf from other service providers.
2. The client will be informed if confidentiality cannot be maintained in the following situations:
  - a. When a dependent adult<sup>1</sup> or child<sup>2</sup> has been abused, exploited, or neglected.

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<sup>1</sup> A dependent adult is defined as a person eighteen years of age or older who is unable to protect the person's own interests or unable to adequately perform or obtain services necessary to meet essential human needs, as a result of a physical or mental condition which requires assistance from another, or as defined by department rule, Iowa Code § 235B.2 (2011).

<sup>2</sup> A child is defined in Iowa Code § 232.68 (2011) as any person under the age of 18 years.

- b. Victim Counselors should protect the confidentiality of all information obtained in the course of professional service, except for compelling professional reasons. The general expectation that Victim Counselors will keep information confidential does not apply when disclosure is necessary to prevent serious, foreseeable, and imminent harm to a client or other identifiable person. In all instances, Victim Counselors should disclose the least amount of confidential information necessary to achieve the desired purpose; only information that is directly relevant to the purpose for which the disclosure is made should be revealed.
  - 3. The client will be informed that confidentiality shall not be maintained when a judge issues a court order for specific information in certain circumstances.
  - 4. Clients make final determination about whether or not to release information. When a request for disclosure of information is made by a client, the Sexual Assault Victim Counselor will discuss the potential positive and negative consequences with the client prior to releasing that information. Under no circumstances will the Sexual Assault Victim Counselor make the final determination on a release of information.
  - 5. The Sexual Assault Victim Counselor will preserve the confidentiality of information provided by the person served or acquired from other sources during and after the course of the professional relationship.
  - 6. Clients have the right to remain anonymous.
  - 7. Clients have the right to refuse all or part of services to protect their anonymity.
- C. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will inform clients of the following:*
- 1. The array of services offered by the project.
  - 2. The qualifications of the Sexual Assault Victim Counselor.
  - 3. The agency's grievance procedure.
  - 4. The obligation to report child abuse to the Department of Human Services if the Sexual Assault Victim Counselor is a mandatory reporter under Iowa law for a licensure or if deemed so by her or his agency. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors are not specifically defined as a mandatory reporter under Iowa law. Clients shall be made aware of any mandatory reporters prior to receiving services.
  - 5. The nature and limits of confidentiality and how these are differentiated by the type of release.
- D. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will work to increase victim safety; will respect the authority and autonomy of the adult victim to direct her or his own life; and will hold the perpetrator, not the victim, responsible for the assault.*
- 1. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will accept what a client tells them about the assault, withholding opinion or judgment.

2. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will treat the client with respect and honesty in both verbal and nonverbal communication.
  3. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will share knowledge they have with clients as it pertains to the client's situation. This may include the dynamics of sexual assault, short and long-term effects of sexual assault, options for reporting the assault if desired, medical and counseling options, housing options, the social and political issues that contribute to the continuance of sexual assault, and any other options as dictated by the client's specific situation.
  4. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors who anticipate they will terminate or interrupt services to clients should notify those individuals promptly and work with the client to transition out of services in a respectful manner. Victim Counselors will facilitate the transfer, referral, or termination of service in relation to the client's needs and preferences.
  5. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors should withdraw services abruptly only under unusual circumstances, giving careful consideration to all factors in the situation and taking care to minimize possible adverse affects. Victim Counselors must consult with their supervisor about any perceived need for abrupt termination of services.
- E. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will fairly distribute time, goods and services among all clients. Victim Counselors will not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of sex, race, color, age, sexual orientation, religion, national origin, political beliefs, marital status, mental or physical ability, economic, gender non-conforming, or any other discriminatory basis.*
1. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will have knowledge of and respect for diverse backgrounds and life realities of clients.
  2. Should one client's need conflict with another client's needs, Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will act with regard to one client only after promptly referring the other to another qualified service provider will, in consultation with their supervisor, determine the best way to provide ethical and respectful services to both clients. This may include providing services to both clients, or referring one client to another IowaCASA member program or other qualified service provider.
- F. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will delineate between work and social relationships and will be aware of the inherent privilege and power differences. The Victim Counselor will never exploit relationships with clients for personal advantage.*
1. Prior and/or present social or business relationships with clients require special consideration. Victim Counselors will consult with their supervisor

- about respectful and ethical service provision and, if desired, the coalition when there is a dual relationship with a client.
2. Creating personal relationships between a Victim Counselor and a client after receiving services is always inappropriate. Sexual/romantic relationships with current or former clients are a crime under Iowa Code Chapter 709.15.
  3. Provision of services to family or friends is prohibited. Family and friends should be referred to another service provider within the agency or another IowaCASA member program. If services are to be provided by the same agency, the agency will create special confidentiality boundaries between the client and their loved one.

**II. The Sexual Assault Victim Counselor has an Ethical Responsibility to keep records.**

- A. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will keep records documenting services provided in accordance with state and federal guidelines.*
- B. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will record statistical and factual information, not opinions, speculations, or conclusions. Under no circumstances shall a Sexual Assault Victim Counselor make a mental or physical health diagnosis.*
- C. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will allow clients access to their own records, including copies if requested. Victim Counselors will inform clients of the importance of protecting written records.*

**III. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors have an ethical responsibility to themselves.**

- A. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors with education, training and experience have the right to be called professionals and to be treated professionally.*
- B. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors have an obligation to join with other professionals to promote and support recognition and fair treatment of the profession.*
- C. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will see to their own empowerment and nurturing.*
- D. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will recognize when personal circumstances may compromise professional abilities, performance, or judgment and will take steps to resolve those issues.*
- E. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will avoid relationships or commitments that conflict with the interests of the individuals they serve or the agency for whom they work.*

**IV. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors have an ethical responsibility in relationships with employers, colleagues, and the public.**

- A. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will adhere to the policies and procedures of their employers.*

- B. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will treat colleagues and other professionals in such a way as to promote mutual respect, public confidence, and improvement of service.*
- C. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors should not assume professional responsibility for the clients of another agency or a colleague without proper communication with that agency or colleague within the bounds required by confidentiality.*
- D. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors must clearly distinguish in public statements their personal views from positions adopted by organizations for which they work or are members.*
- E. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will not reveal the name or other identifying information about a client to other colleagues or the public without a written informed consent release from the survivor or the legal requirements to do so. Sexual Assault Victim Counselors should be aware that it can be very easy to identify a client with even seemingly minor identifying information, particularly in small communities and rural areas.*
- F. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will report to their supervisor and/or IowaCASA any conflict of interest that prevents themselves or a colleague from being able to provide ethical services, work cooperatively with colleagues or allied professionals, or be impartial in the treatment of any client.*
- G. *Sexual Assault Victim Counselors will report violations of the Code of Ethics by fellow Sexual Assault Victim Counselors to the Certification Committee in a timely manner.*