



CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

GENERAL GUIDELINES

Ottawa County Pregnancy Services values the protection of confidential information. During the course of service for Ottawa County Pregnancy Services an employee or volunteer may learn confidential information, such as financial, personal, or medical matters affecting the lives of other employees or volunteers, or those served by Ottawa County Pregnancy Services or those affecting the business operations of Ottawa County Pregnancy Services. Unauthorized sharing of such information is prohibited.

CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Every client seen at Ottawa County Pregnancy Services is promised and every center team member has a duty to uphold confidentiality, unless an exception applies. Some exceptions include when disclosure is required by law, or there exists morally compelling circumstances to break confidentiality, or when necessary to protect the client or others from serious, foreseeable, and imminent bodily harm, or when the center is engaged in a criminal or civil dispute with the client.

In almost all other situations, client information, including identity, may only be shared with the client's written permission. When in doubt, the center should consult a local attorney knowledgeable in healthcare and/or counseling law.

Every client of Ottawa County Pregnancy Services signs a [Request for Services] form acknowledging their understanding of the center's promise of confidentiality and its limitations prior to beginning to receive services at the center. This form includes the following disclaimer:

All information shared by you during your relationship as a client with this center will be kept in strict confidence except as required by law or as required for the protection of you or others.

This center holds in strict confidence the information you provide with the following exceptions: due to concern for your safety and/or state law, we are required to report knowledge of a client who is suicidal, homicidal, abusing a minor, a minor being abused, or a victim of statutory rape, or when otherwise required to disclose such information by law.

EXPLANATION OF EXCEPTIONS TO CLIENT CONFIDENTIALITY

Subpoenas—Center personnel shall comply with subpoenas for client information. [See policy on subpoenas]

Public Health—Center personnel shall release client information related to infectious diseases as required to the appropriate public health agency. [See policy on infectious disease reporting]

Suicide/Homicide—Center personnel shall report to law enforcement credible threats of suicidal or homicidal intentions. [See policy on suicide/homicide reporting]

Child Abuse/Neglect or Elder Abuse/Neglect—Center personnel shall act as mandatory reports under state law, reporting suspicions of child abuse or neglect to law enforcement and / or the appropriate child protection agency. [See policy on child abuse/neglect]

Fake Clients—When it has been confirmed beyond a reasonable doubt that the “client” has obtained services under false pretenses, such as using the visit to produce an untruthful report on behalf of a pro-abortion advocacy organization, the center may disclose the circumstances of the visit to the extent necessary to defend their practices from falsehoods.

Legal Disputes with the Center—When the client has committed some crime against the center or is posing a threat to center personnel, or when the client has filed a lawsuit against the center, the center may disclose that information which is necessary to defend itself or seek justice.

ACCESS TO CLIENT INFORMATION

Client files and personally identifying information shall be maintained securely. Only personnel having a legitimate need may access this information.

Hard copy files shall be stored in a lockable filing cabinet in a lockable room. When the center is closed, all client files shall be locked and the room also locked. When the room or filing cabinet is unlocked, access to the files should be supervised by authorized personnel who can ensure they are only accessed by other authorized individuals. Keys shall only be available to center personnel who are authorized to access the files.

Electronic files shall be password protected and accessible only through a password protected computer. Passwords should be difficult to guess, changed every ninety days, and never stored where they may be accessed by unauthorized persons.

Under no circumstances may hard copy information leave the center premises nor may electronic information be shared with unauthorized persons.

When anyone other than a client requests information concerning a client, including verification of the identity of a client, that request will be refused unless the client’s written permission has been obtained or a subpoena or court order is issued. Client information is not given over the phone to anyone unless written permission has been obtained (this includes relatives, partners, medical personnel, government agents, etc.)

CLIENT RECORD RETENTION & INTEGRITY

The center shall maintain the original record of each client for seven years, or seven years from the date of the client's majority, whichever is longer. In no circumstances shall this record be destroyed or altered prior to that time. After that time, the client's record may be securely destroyed.

RELEASE OF CLIENT INFORMATION

A client requesting a copy of their own records or requesting that the record or any portion thereof be released to a third party shall make that request in writing, specifying what portion of the record is to be released, and when the permission to share the record expires, prior to center releasing any copy of the record. The center shall make a/an [healthcare privacy practices] authorization to release information form available to the client for this request and the center shall also accept any equivalent form from another agency, institution, or health care provider. Along with the written request, the center shall verify the client's identity by (a) requesting a copy of the client's government issued photo identification, and/or (b) comparing the signature on the written request with the client's signature on another form in the client's file. A copy of the authorization to release information form shall be maintained in the client's file.

Within the center, confidential client identifying information is shared only with persons who have a legitimate need to know. Personnel should not gossip about clients or their situations. Prayer requests should be general and should contain no client identifying information.

The center only contacts clients in ways that the client has authorized in writing and shares only the types of information authorized by the client in those ways.

Center personnel do not identify themselves when leaving phone messages for clients.

CLIENT STORIES

Clients who have benefitted from the services of the center may be invited to share or permit the center to share their stories or related information (including photos or videos of the client and/or minor children). Invitations to share client experiences are unpressured and non-coercive. Ottawa County Pregnancy Services strive to make the sharing experience empowering rather than exploitive for clients by informing clients of how their story and/or images may be used, that receiving continued services from the center is never conditioned on allowing the center to use their story or images of them or their child, and that they have the right to seek legal counsel prior to allowing use of their story and/or images. A signed form signifying this understanding shall be obtained prior to use of any client's story and/or images and this form shall be maintained in the client's file.

DONOR / SUPPORTER INFORMATION

Non-public information about current, former, or prospective donors and supporters of Ottawa County Pregnancy Services, including their identity, is treated as confidential and may not be shared outside of the center or with personnel who do not need access to the information.

TRAINING

All personnel, including volunteers and staff, are trained to comply with these procedures.

UNAUTHORIZED DISCLOSURE

Any unauthorized disclosure or distribution by any means including electronic transmission or copying of OCPS's confidential information, or that of its employees, volunteers, donors or donees, is prohibited.

EXPECTATION TO PROTECT CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

Employees are expected to keep confidential all information which they receive in the course of their employment except to the extent necessary in carrying out their official duties.

RETURN OBLIGATION

Upon termination of employment with Ottawa County Pregnancy Services all employees will return any confidential documents or information in their possession or stored on any personally-owned device they may use for business purposes.

DISCIPLINARY ACTION

Any employee who discloses confidential information learned from their work for Ottawa County Pregnancy Services will be subject to disciplinary action, including possible termination. Unauthorized disclosure by volunteers and board members will subject the volunteer/board member to comparable sanctions.