

Confidentiality Policy

General

There are two principles which staff should keep in mind at all times when considering matters relating to confidentiality.

1. Staff should be very wary about offering complete confidentiality to young people and should fully understand when this may and may not be appropriate. They should also understand the valuable role that taking a responsible attitude to confidentiality can play in developing trusting relationships with young people and be able to distinguish this from a collusive relationship which involves 'keeping secrets'. Induction training covers this topic however, if a staff member is in any doubt about the boundaries of confidentiality at any time, they should seek guidance from their line manager or the Senior Manager
2. Staff should never underestimate or forget the degree to which young people can be made to feel devalued when personal information about them is casually shared in a thoughtless and inappropriate way.
 - All staff should remain acutely aware that information to which they have access concerning young people and their families is of a confidential, sensitive and privileged nature.
 - Young people at Doorstep should feel that personal details which are disclosed to staff will be treated with respect. The same respect for confidential information should be shown by staff to their colleagues.
 - All those who have a management role should pay proper regard to the confidentiality of information which passes between them as part of the supervisory, or any other management process, such as the conduct of disciplinary, competency or capability procedures.
 - Information about young people is shared between teams and with Management on a basis that is governed by the 'need to know' in order to maintain best support and care practice.
 - Information about young people should not be shared casually across teams, nor should it be treated in an inappropriate manner or become the subject of 'gossip' among staff.
 - Staff are not permitted to discuss personal details relating to the support of young people outside work, i.e. with friends or family. If it comes to the attention of their line manager or the Senior Manager that they are so doing this constitutes a disciplinary offence.
 - Staff should be aware of the regulations regarding data protection under the Data Protection Act and act at all times in accordance with these regulations and the organisation's Data Protection Policy
 - Staff should at all times remain aware of the young person's right to have personal information kept confidential and should always check before disclosing any details to other agencies, e.g. GP's, teachers, that it is both necessary and appropriate to share that piece of information.

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- Young people should receive written guidelines and be reminded at appropriate times about situations in which confidentiality can never be kept i.e. when they disclose information which relates to current or past abuse; the likelihood or risk of abuse against themselves or vulnerable others; or information relating to criminal acts committed or planned.
- All staff should be aware of those people who have a right to access written information which is held on file about a young person and should not release information to any other person.
- Written records should at all times be kept under lock and key when not in use.
- Each file contains all the necessary information, and young people are made aware that they may read their files (confidential or third party information excepted) and are actively encouraged to do so and to correct errors and add personal statements.

Requests for Information

Doorstep will check that requests made for information clearly describe the information required, and why it is required.

Doorstep will verify the identity of the person making the request; check that consent has been given to disclose the information detailed in the request; and establish that there is a genuine need to know before disclosing any information about a client .

Doorstep will comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 at all times.

General Callers

No matter how plausible the request is, the organisation does not give out any personal information about tenants.

In genuine emergencies we would offer to pass on a telephone message.

Letters from lending institutions requesting a financial reference must be accompanied by a signed and dated authorisation from the client.

Housing Benefit and Benefit Agencies

After checking the identity of the caller and being given the client's name and address, the following may be disclosed.

- Tenancy start date.
- The weekly or monthly rent and council tax payable.
- Details of any benefits payments received.
- The client's previous address if relevant to the claim.

We will refer requests for other information to the client unless Doorstep has general written authority from them to act on their behalf in respect of their claim.

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Electricity, Water and Gas Companies

Doorstep will check the identity of the caller; we will telephone back if in doubt. We will give the following information only: name of tenant, date of commencement and termination of tenancy, meter reading if applicable.

Doorstep will not give any forwarding address.

The Police

Generally, only the name and address of the tenant and the household composition may be divulged without a Court Order.

The above does not apply where the organisation is investigating fraud or criminal activities against itself, or where there are threats of violence, threats to the safety of the staff or criminal damage is involved.

Care will be taken to avoid divulging information that the police would otherwise require a Court Order to obtain.

Social Services Departments

After checking the identity of the caller and ascertaining the reason for the request, the names and addresses of tenants may be given.

If we are aware of neglect or child abuse, we will act in accordance with our legal responsibilities to safeguard regardless of whether consent to share information has been given

Medical and Psychiatric Information

Information about a client's medical condition is strictly confidential to the client, the staff supporting them and/or any agency providing such information to the organisation. The exception to this being where there is a genuine reason to share this information in order to safeguard the client or any other person. Clients will be informed of the need to share information prior to it being shared and consent will be obtained wherever possible.

Exceptional Disclosure

When information is disclosed for exceptional reasons (e.g. Court Order or where there is a genuine risk to health and safety), this will be sanctioned by a service manager before the disclosure is made.