

Code of Professional Ethics for DC SAFE

Central Tenet:

We place survivor needs and concerns at the forefront of our work both individually and across systems. We acknowledge our limitations and strive to create solutions and practice harm reduction to meet client needs.

Who We Are:

1. We are an intersectional feminist, anti-racist, pro-choice organization whose work is centered on the needs and experiences of survivors of Intimate Partner Violence.
2. We recognize that Intimate Partner Violence is rooted in historical trauma and gender oppression. We acknowledge that domestic violence disproportionately impacts women of color and transgender and gender-nonconforming people. We believe in full and equal access to safety, quality of life, and resources for everyone. Access to resources creates safety.
3. We define Intimate Partner Violence as a pattern of coercive behaviors for the purpose of gaining power and control over a partner. We know that there are different risk factors in intimate partner relationships that create a greater potential for harm.
4. We strive to provide progressive and dynamic interventions with our community partners and survivors, seeking to bridge the gap in knowledge and promote effective collaborations.
5. Our advocacy is rooted in a strengths-based approach that focuses on resiliency and skill-building. Our belief is that advocacy needs to be centered in the community with a focus on self-determination, collaboration, inclusivity, empathy and an awareness of the compounding needs survivors face specific to Washington DC. We recognize that this requires us to be flexible and creative in our solutions.
6. We challenge systems of oppression and acknowledge the impact of state power specifically as it relates to systemic violence and racism. We fight to eradicate and not perpetuate these systems.
7. We acknowledge that social change requires a long term commitment to social justice. This is a marathon and not a sprint and as such requires building expertise in our communities and a foundation of resilience in our advocates.
8. We strive to create a trauma-informed, space by demonstrating, through client empowerment, program design, staff education, and direct care, an understanding of the relationships among IPV, DV, SA and trauma.

How we Operate:

- **Persistence:** Finds ways around obstacles and tries new approaches to get the job done.
- **Continuous improvement:** Constantly learns from and improves in our work.
- **Decency:** Treats others as they would want to be treated, includes clients and co-workers.
- **Humility:** Acknowledges what they do not know and approaches others.
- **Integrity:** Aligns their actions with their words and operates with transparency.

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Our Service Values:

1. **Transparency:** We foster an environment among staff, clients and partners in which we are open and honest about our beliefs, approach, needs, limitations and impact.
2. **Survivor Centered:** We acknowledge that domestic violence is only a part of a survivor's narrative and strive to serve the whole person.
3. **Accountability:** We acknowledge our limitations and biases, and we actively seek better answers and solutions for continuous improvement and education.
4. **Communication:** We believe in effective co-advocacy through thoughtful and active communication, while respecting survivor confidentiality.
5. **Inclusivity:** We are committed to including individuals and/or marginalized groups into processes, activities, and decision/policymaking in a way that shares power. We acknowledge and value the varied life experiences of our coworkers and clients recognize that diversity is our strength.
6. **Low-barrier:** We are committed to developing and delivering services that seek to meet our clients where they are. To eliminate barriers that create undo hardship and revictimization for survivors. We strive to always say yes-we're tenacious, flexible and creative in meeting our clients needs.
7. **Humility:** We acknowledge that our work with survivors requires constant growth and learning. We value the lessons learned from each survivor and their experience. We are a dynamic organization committed to continuous improvement and we value opportunities for growth and self-reflection.

In relationships with colleagues, other professionals, and the public, DC SAFE Staff shall:

- Work in a collaborative environment in which each staff member, regardless of their job function, is trained and works on direct services.
- Maintain a collegial and respectful work environment.
- Maintain an environment in which workplace bullying or abuse is not tolerated.
- Share knowledge and encourage proficiency and excellence in victim assistance among colleagues and allied professionals, paid and volunteer.
- Provide professional support, guidance, and assistance to Advocates who are new to the field in order to promote consistent quality and professionalism.
- Distinguish clearly in public statements one's personal views from positions adopted by the organization for which they work or is a member.
- Take personal responsibility for professional growth.
- Provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received, supervised experience, or other relevant professional experience.
- Conduct relationships with colleagues in such a way as to promote mutual respect, public respect, and improvement of service.
- Make statements that are critical of colleagues only if they are verifiable and constructive in purpose.

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- Conduct relationships with allied professionals such that they are given equal respect and dignity as professionals.
- Respect confidential information shared by colleagues in the course of their professional relationships and transactions.
- Avoid unwarranted negative criticism of colleagues in communications with clients or with other professionals. Unwarranted negative criticism may include demeaning comments that refer to colleagues' level of competence or to individuals' attributes such as race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, and mental or physical disability.

In relationships with every client, SAFE Staff shall:

- Approach service delivery using the empowerment model of client-defined advocacy, in which the client is regarded as the expert and the decision-maker about their own life using the information provided by the Advocate. Advocacy is a process in which an advocate partners with a survivor of domestic violence to provide the information and resources the survivor needs to navigate systems. The survivor defines their needs and makes decisions based on the information provided.
- Protect the safety of the domestic violence victim at all times.
- Have a primary commitment to provide the highest quality professional support for those who seek services.
- Dedicate themselves to the best interest of clients and empower clients to help themselves.
- Use clear and understandable language to inform clients of the purpose of the services, risks related to the services, limits to services, relevant costs, reasonable alternatives, clients' right to refuse or withdraw consent, and the time frame covered by the consent.
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that documentation in records is accurate and reflects the services provided.
- Protect clients' privacy within their documentation to the extent that is possible and appropriate and should include only information that is directly relevant to the delivery of services.
- Serve the public interest by contributing to the improvement of systems that impact victims of crime.
- Act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups.
- Discuss with clients and other interested parties the nature of confidentiality and limitations of clients' right to confidentiality. Advocates should review with clients' circumstances where confidential information may be requested and where disclosure of confidential information may be legally required. This discussion should occur as soon as possible in the advocate-client relationship and as needed throughout the course of the relationship.
- Advocates should not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be ensured. Advocates should not discuss confidential information in public or semi-public areas such as hallways, waiting rooms, elevators, and restaurants.
- Understand their legal responsibilities, limitations, and the implications of their actions within the service delivery setting and perform duties in accordance with laws, regulations, policies, and legislated rights of persons served.
- Not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing services or conducting social work evaluation or research. Once private information is shared, standards of confidentiality apply.
- Protect the confidentiality of clients during legal proceedings to the extent permitted by law. When a court of law or other legally authorized body orders advocates to disclose confidential or privileged information without a client's consent and such disclosure could cause harm to the client, advocates should request that the court

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SURVIVORS AND ADVOCATES FOR EMPOWERMENT

Supporting and Empowering Domestic Violence Survivors since 1997
Apoyando a Víctimas de Violencia Doméstica desde 1997

withdraw the order or limit the order as narrowly as possible or maintain the records under seal, unavailable for public inspection.

- Protect the confidentiality of clients' written and electronic records and other sensitive information. Advocates should take reasonable steps to ensure that clients' records are stored in a secure location and that clients' records are not available to others who are not authorized to have access.
- Transfer or dispose of clients' records in a manner that protects clients' confidentiality and is consistent with state statutes governing records.
- Provide equal access to services for special populations, as well as services tailored to the specific needs of those populations.
- Not discriminate against any victims, employee, colleague, allied professional, or member of the public on the basis of race/ethnicity, language, gender, age, sexual orientation, (dis)ability, social class, economic status, education, marital status, religious belief, or HIV status.
- Observe the ethical imperative to have no sexual relations or sexual contact with clients, in recognition that to do so risks exploitation of the knowledge and trust derived from the professional relationship.
- Not use their official position to secure gifts, monetary rewards, or special privileges or advantages.
- Not engage in dual or multiple relationships with clients or former clients in which there is a risk of exploitation or potential harm to the client. In instances when dual or multiple relationships are unavoidable, advocates should take steps to protect clients and are responsible for setting clear, appropriate, and culturally sensitive boundaries.
- Not sexually harass clients. Sexual harassment includes sexual advances, sexual solicitation, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.
- Develop knowledge, personal awareness, and sensitivity pertinent to the client populations served and incorporate culturally relevant techniques into their practice.
- In instances when clients are not literate or have difficulty understanding the primary language used in the practice setting, Advocates should take steps to ensure clients' comprehension. This may include providing clients with a detailed verbal explanation or arranging for a qualified interpreter or translator whenever possible.
- Respect the interests of the client as a primary responsibility.
- Respond compassionately to each client with personalized services.
- Listen to the client's statement of events as it is told, withholding opinion or judgment.

I, the undersigned applicant, hereby certify that I have read and agree to follow the Code of Professional Ethics for DC SAFE Staff.

Print Applicant Name: _____

Signature of Applicant: _____

Date: _____

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