

Confidentiality

Home and Online Reading Volunteers

The issue of confidentiality is of central importance to Doorstep Library, and our observance of confidentiality is crucial to the development of trust between us and the families we visit.

Confidentiality does not mean that you cannot tell your Team Leader or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) – they are still bound by confidentiality (unless the safety of a person is at risk).

What does confidentiality mean?

- Confidential information is shared between two people (occasionally more); in the context of Doorstep Library usually between a parent or child and a volunteer and Doorstep staff as appropriate.
- As the families will get to know you and see you regularly they will trust you increasingly and may share information of a confidential nature.
- The sharing of confidential information will place a responsibility on the listener who shares the “burden”.

How do we respond when someone confides in us?

- In most situations, it is enough to listen to the person, to acknowledge what they say: “*I see - I understand - it must be difficult*”, reassure them. If the nature of the confidential information worries the volunteer, she/he should always discuss it with the Team Leader (or the DSL if a safeguarding concern).
- Never enter into a collusive conversation – for example: “I’ve got something to tell you - you won’t tell anyone will you?” You cannot promise this; “I can’t make a promise like that, it depends what you are going to tell me”.
- Remember you have been chosen as the confidante, so you should not feel inadequate to deal with the information you have been given. Such confidence may sometimes be a cry for help or need for a listening ear - you may not be able to do anything about it but it can be helpful to the person to tell somebody.

Guidelines on confidentiality

- *How must information be shared with social services and police, if requested?* Confidentiality can be broken in such cases where there is a safeguarding issue, but the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) will advise you and take over. You will need to provide a written account of what has been said/ witnessed, so that the DSL does not mistakenly report incorrect information. The imparting of information will be carefully presented so that it will reflect a situation without prejudices and bringing light on the strengths and efforts of the individual concerned whenever possible. If appropriate, the DSL or Team Leader will report back on any developments with the situation.
- Never be drawn into discussing one family with another. If you make it clear that you cannot discuss another person, this will strengthen the trust between you and the family you are visiting.
- Do not tell other families who else you are going to read with or visit.
- If speaking about something personal with one family member e.g. a mother, don't discuss this conversation with another family member e.g. the father or partner, as you don't know how he/she may react or what they know already. For example, if you are talking to a mother, and her partner arrives and asks what you are doing there, simply talk about Doorstep Library in relation to the reading sessions.

- Make sure that you do not discuss a previous visit outside of the family's house, in front of the next door, in lifts/stairwells/corridors, or do so without using names and in low voices. You never know who can hear. For online sessions, make sure that the family have left the call before you talk about how it went.
- Be very careful what you say if you meet a volunteer or the Team Leader in a public place, do not mention names of family members or estates.
- If you bump in to a family outside of the sessions, wait for them to acknowledge you first and if so, ensure that the conversation does not become personal to avoid other people overhearing.
- *Can you talk about what is encountered in the course of our visits outside of Doorstep Library?* Yes, but avoid giving names of people or places. If you are explaining what you do as a Doorstep Library volunteer to a friend or to a relative, or to anybody else who is interested, do not disclose personal information about the families you visit, keep it general. Be aware of who your audience is and avoid speaking negatively so as not to perpetuate stereotypes.
- Always think carefully about how much you want to say about a specific family at base/in group meetings with other volunteers. Avoid using names to protect the family's privacy. If it is the right place to discuss a family's problems, find ways to discuss this in a constructive way: "*how can we help such a situation...*?" rather than exposing the situation in terms of failings and inadequacies. These sessions are also the right place to discuss your difficulties with coping/ making progress with a family and hear ideas from the team. When you are worried about something too sensitive to talk about in front of the rest of the volunteer team, talk privately to the Team Leader.

Online Reading Volunteers:

- Do not take unauthorised screen shots or recording of a reading session or the database
- Do not screen share the database with a family as this contains personal information about other families

Home Reading Volunteers:

- Do not shout 'Doorstep Library' loudly when knocking on a door. If someone asks who it is before opening, say our name in a normal voice so neighbours don't hear.
- Always keep any written information in a safe place (e.g. the zip pocket of your rucksack, a secure pocket).
- Do not show the families/children your visit list, even if they ask. Fold it/place it face down/put it away.
- If talking to professionals at base/on the estate who know a family you are visiting, never be drawn into disclosing information that has been told in confidence. Do not reveal where the family live or any of their details. Refer the professional to your Team Leader or give them a Doorstep flyer with our office number on. Do not introduce families to professionals unless discussed with the Team Leader, who will usually seek the family's permission first.

Doorstep Library Network depends on confidentiality in two ways:

- In order to comply with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), we must be able to show that all information about families remains confidential within Doorstep Library
- The relationship between a family and a Doorstep Library Volunteer is a special one. It is often closer than any other "professional" relationships as we visit people on a "friendly" basis. This relationship depends on trust; this would be shattered if a family thought that this confidence was abused in any way. This could also affect our reputation on the estate/as an organisation.

Sharing of Information

All information shared by an individual family with a Doorstep Library volunteer is treated as confidential and must not be shared outside the charity. It is the same for whatever knowledge we gather through weekly contact with families.

You may in the course of your visits to families be given information of a very personal nature by parents/ carers. Treat this as confidential and do not share the details with the team, except the Team Leader to decide on new steps with this family, or if it raises concerns regarding the safety and welfare of the children.

We will record information regarding each family in our weekly notes. Paper copies of any notes (visit lists when on the ground, for example) must not get lost - the information must be kept confidential within the team. You must not disclose your login details for the Doorstep Library database to **anyone**, and should not write them down.

Any notes or written records of a sensitive nature should not be kept in the home or computer/device of a volunteer. Such records must be immediately passed on to the Doorstep Library Team Leader. Do not keep copies.

There was a poster campaign in World War II with the slogan “*careless talk costs lives*”. It may not be a matter of life or death for us, but what we say about people does have very serious consequences in terms of individual reputation, trust in others, prejudices and respecting privacy, and can tip the balance for an individual family not being comfortable receiving Doorstep Library visits anymore.

Ensure that you do not talk about the families or the estate in general terms which will contribute to a bad reputation. Find positive things to say about estates and the families living on them.