

HELP & SHELTER'S POLICY ON SENSITIVE & OTHER IMPORTANT ISSUES

Every person who works with Help & Shelter in any capacity must agree in writing to adhere to and be bound by this policy.

To the extent that it is inconsistent with any previous policy, it supersedes that policy.

Background

Help & Shelter's mandate is to contribute to the removal of the use of violence in our society. Frequently, associated issues arise, which, irrespective of our personal positions, need to be met with a common Help & Shelter response.

General

- We will uphold and comply with all human rights/anti-discriminatory legislation and international conventions
- We recognise that while we are unified in our commitment to end violence in all its forms, we are diverse in many other respects
- We will respect our diversity at all times
- We will not allow bigotry in any form to dictate the work that we do and the persons by or for whom it is done

Racial Prejudice/Discrimination

- We will not accede to requests that counselling, public education or other help be/be not provided by a person of a particular race
- We will discourage racial prejudice and discrimination in all our work

Homosexuality

- We will apply our counselling skills and strategies to deal with issues of abuse and violence professionally and impartially whatever our individual feelings towards homosexuality and same sex relationships may be
- We will not attempt to change people's sexual orientation
- We recognise the need for further training with regard to specific issues that may arise

Religious, Gender and other Prejudices

- We will not pander to religious prejudice, sexism, ageism or other prejudices
- We recognise however that some of our clients and public education partners may, because of perceptions of the quality of intervention, prefer to deal with persons of a particular religion, gender, age or socio-economic class
- While we may meet a special request, we will engage the makers in straightforward discussion of the perceptions associated with that request
- If in doubt as to whether to meet a special request, we may discuss it among ourselves

Abortion

- We recognise the right of every pregnant woman to make an informed choice as to whether or not she wants to give birth
- We will encourage her to get information and advice on all options
- We will tell her about the agencies (e.g. the Family Planning Association of Guyana, the Early

Pregnancy Advisory Service and the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association)

- that give information and advice
- We will not attempt to counsel on whether or not she should remain pregnant
- If we are uncomfortable with a client's choice, we may refer her to another counsellor
- In cases of pregnancy resulting from rape, we will:
 - provide rape trauma counselling
 - refer the client to (an)other agency/agencies for appropriate advice and assistance regarding the pregnancy

Corporal punishment

- We will not condone the corporal punishment of children any time, any place, anywhere
- We will do all that we can to educate parents and prospective parents, teachers and caregivers about non-violent disciplinary alternatives

Complaints/Allegations of Misconduct

- We recognise that complaints/allegations of misconduct may be made against any of us
- We will not investigate anonymous complaints/allegations
- We will investigate complaints/allegations made by persons who are willing to be identified and to sign a written statement
- We accept that investigation of a complaint/allegation made against us may be carried out before we are made aware of it
- Investigations will be carried out by the board. Outside assistance will only be sought if the board considers it necessary
- Our response to a complaint/allegation will be as follows:
 - We will ask the complainant's name and if s/he refuses to give it, politely state our policy of not investigating anonymous complaints/allegations
 - If the complaint/allegation is made second-hand (i.e. the complaint/allegation has been made to the person contacting us by a third party), we will politely tell the person passing on the complaint/allegation that we will not investigate anonymous complaints/allegations
 - If the complainant is willing to give her/his name and to sign a written statement, we will obtain contact information and brief details of the complaint/allegation and inform the complainant that the coordinator or a director will be in touch with him/her shortly to arrange for a written statement to be taken
 - In no circumstances will we make any comment upon or engage in any discussion of the complaint/allegation
 - All complaints and allegations must be treated with complete confidentiality

Complaints About Our Service

- If a complaint is made about Help & Shelter's handling of a particular case, we will find out the details of the case (name, year of occurrence etc.) and bring it to the attention of the coordinator or a board member so that the file can be found, checked and an appropriate response given
- In order to ensure that we are able to respond to complaints, we will ensure that all files contain –
 - Full records of all meetings, phone calls, referrals and discussions
 - Copies of all correspondence and all other relevant documents
- We recognise that there will be persons who will not be satisfied with our services, but will endeavour to resolve any differences before we close a file

The Media

- We recognise that the media is important to raise awareness about domestic violence and child abuse, and about our work
- We will take full advantage of opportunities to carry out public education work through the print and electronic media
- We will however resist any attempt to politicise our work or to introduce any partisanship into the work we do and if we receive a media request for a comment on any particular issue (i.e. on a matter that is related to 'news' rather than public education) we will refer it to a board member or the coordinator
- We will whenever possible issue a print statement to the media if asked for a comment on any particular issue