



Friends of the Family Winchester Limited

## Confidentiality Policy

### 1. Aim and Scope of the Policy

Friends of the Family works with parents and children who are facing hardships and challenges in family life. We provide a range of support services and practical guidance to enable them to work through challenges and face the future with confidence.

Our service users have the right to receive a professional, supportive, and appropriate response to their requests, and we strive to offer them a safe and nurturing environment. Through individual, group and holistic support, we try to meet the unique needs and vulnerabilities of each child or parent.

Maintaining confidentiality is vitally important for this work, and all of us – staff, trustees, volunteers and other service users – share responsibility for this.

This policy outlines how confidentiality works in practice and explains the individual responsibilities of everyone involved with the charity. It also highlights the rare occasions when – for safeguarding or legal reasons – it may be necessary to over-ride our normal procedures.

### 2. Confidential Information

Confidential information is any information which is regarded as 'personal'. It may be told to an individual or to a group of people but is not meant for public or general knowledge. It includes matters such as name, address and sexual orientation, as well as information about a person's lifestyle, relationships and financial situation.

As a charity, we need to handle identifiable written, verbal and computerised information about service users, volunteers, staff and supporters. However, this information is held by, and shared within, the organisation only where it is strictly necessary for us to function effectively.

Users of our services can be reassured that all staff, trustees and volunteers at Friends of Family are responsible for maintaining confidentiality of all privileged information to which they may be exposed whilst working in the organisation. Those who work and volunteer for us must read and sign the Confidentiality Declaration at Appendix 1.

### 3. Handling Confidential Information

We take data protection very seriously. All information is kept securely. More details on how we treat, handle, and manage data is set out in the separate Data Protection Policy.

## **4. Obligations**

All information given to us in trust must be treated with respect, and everyone at Friends of the Family has an obligation to maintain confidentiality.

### **Volunteer Obligations**

Volunteers have direct contact with service users and may become aware of confidential information. They must not share any information about service users, or about their contacts with the service users, with anyone except the Service Project Manager/ Counsellor. Specifically, they must not share such information in conversations with people from other organisations, family or friends.

Volunteers should not offer personal information to a service user about themselves or about colleagues or the charity. Personal confidences cannot be guaranteed in this situation.

Volunteers must not withhold information from their Project Manager even if the service user involved requests them to do so. This is explained to service users at the outset of any befriending or group relationship.

Any breach of confidentiality will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.

After leaving Friends of the Family, volunteers must not reveal any confidential information gained during their time with the charity to any other party.

### **Staff and Trustee Obligations**

During their employment staff may have access to confidential information regarding other staff, volunteers, service users and the charity. They must respect the confidentiality of this information and may not divulge it to any other parties for any reason.

After leaving Friends of the Family, staff and trustees must not reveal any confidential information gained during their time with the charity to any other party.

All staff must ensure that any confidential information is stored in line with our Data Protection Policy and procedures.

### **Service User Obligations**

All service users will be made aware that our primary responsibility is for their safety and protection, and the safety and protection of other service users.

Service users are also responsible for maintaining the confidentiality of any privileged information to which they may be exposed whilst using any service provided by Friends of the Family. Mothers receiving group therapy as part of our work with Mums and Young Children are required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement which is prepared by the Therapist and discussed at the start of any group counselling. (Annex 2).

The circumstances under which exceptional disclosures of information may need to be made will be explained to all service users in advance.

## **5. Breaches of Confidentiality**

Inappropriate disclosure – whether by a member of staff, a trustee, a volunteer or a service user – will be treated as a disciplinary matter and dealt with by the Operations Director and/or Chair of Trustees. Failure to maintain confidentiality outside the organisation may result in the termination of that person’s relationship with Friends of the Family.

## **6. Exceptional disclosure of information**

We treat confidentiality very seriously, but from time to time it may be necessary for disclosures to take place. This would happen only when:

1. Exceptional circumstances occur in which ensuring the safety and protection of a service user, volunteer, employee or another person requires the disclosure of information, whether or not agreement has been reached with the person affected. In such a situation, the procedures in our **Safeguarding Policy** will be followed.
2. A serious management issue arises, such as professional misconduct. In such a situation, a volunteer or employee may raise the matter with the Operations Director or a Trustee, with or without the agreement of the volunteer or employee concerned.
3. There is a legal requirement to disclose information in the event of an enquiry which is supported by the necessary legal documentation.

## **7. Information and Training**

All volunteers and employees will be provided with this policy. Training on confidentiality and related issues and the contents of this policy will be provided to all new staff and volunteers, with regular updates to ensure that work practices are in line with its requirements. Project Managers will inform service users of this policy and ensure that a copy is available to them.

## **8. Personal Issues affecting volunteers or employees.**

Volunteers and employees have the option of discussing personal issues adversely affecting their work in confidence with the Project Managers, Operations Director, or the Chair of Trustees. The appropriate measures will then be taken to address these issues without breaking confidentiality, subject to the volunteer’s or employee’s agreement. This may include discussion with an appropriate other person and placing a record of this into the volunteer or employee’s personal file.

## **Policy reviewed and approved by the Board of Trustees**

Signed: *K Hazlitt*

Position: Chair of Trustees

Date: 10<sup>th</sup> October 2023

Review date: October 2025



## **Friends of the Family** **Confidentiality Declaration**

Friends of the Family expects all staff, trustees and volunteers to understand and respect the confidential nature of our work.

Failure to maintain confidentiality may result in the termination of an individual's relationship with the charity.

All staff, trustees and volunteers must read, understand and accept this Confidentiality Policy. If you have any questions or concerns about it, please speak to your Project Manager, the Operations Director or the Chair of Trustees.

### **The Declaration:**

- I have read and understood the Confidentiality Policy and agree to abide by it.
- I will maintain the confidentiality of any confidential information I learn through my involvement with Friends of the Family.
- I understand the scenarios under which confidentiality may need to be disclosed to Friends of the Family staff.
- I will not at any time divulge the names or other details of any families engaged with Friends of the Family to people outside the organisation (other than in the exceptional circumstances outlined in the Confidentiality Policy).

**Signed:**

**Print name:**

**Date:**

## **Mums and Young Children's Group**

### **Counselling contract and working agreement**

At Friends of the Family, we take your privacy and confidentiality very seriously.

#### **Your Confidentiality**

- **All conversations between you and your Counsellor are confidential to Friends of the Family**
- **All group members have the right to safety and confidentiality and no personal information, or the content of discussions may be shared by group members outside of the group.**
- **Group members agree that no names, addresses, or other identifying information may be shared with family, friends, or anyone else outside the group. This applies to all types of communication including conversations, texting, emails or via other electronic devices. If a group member breaches this confidentiality agreement, they may be asked to leave the group.**

There are certain situations where Counsellors have an ethical and legal obligation to share information with other professionals, safeguarding services, or the police. Please read what these situations are carefully and talk to your counsellor if you have any concerns.

- If your counsellor is concerned that you are at risk of serious harm, or has concerns about your safety or well-being, Friends of the Family may contact your GP or another named health professional (e.g. a mental health nurse) involved in your care if you have one. Signing this contract will confirm that you agree to this contact.
- If you share information with your counsellor which leads them to believe that there is a risk of serious harm to a child or a vulnerable adult, we are required by law to take action to safeguard these people from harm. If the counsellor identifies a possible safeguarding concern, they will tell you this and work with you as much as is appropriate in the situation. We may be required to contact adult or child safeguarding services or – if there is an immediate risk - the police. An example scenario is where a counsellor has concerns about a child being at risk of sexual, physical, emotional abuse or neglect. The counsellor is required to discuss safeguarding concerns with their supervisor.
- There are some other rare situations where the law may require us to share information. These relate to Terrorism and money laundering the proceeds of drug trafficking. The Road Traffic Act 1988 permits the police to require information relating to the identification of the driver of a vehicle involved in a road traffic offence.
- Counsellors receive regular clinical supervision of their work. This is in adherence to the policies of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. The anonymity of the client is maintained except in exceptional circumstances such as a safeguarding situation where there may be concerns about you or others being at risk of harm.

### **Your data**

- Identifiable information is gathered to enable Friends of the Family to run the charity effectively and to ensure we are providing the best possible service. E.g. so we can contact you and ensure that the needs of you and your children are catered for. The information is kept securely and only the necessary information is passed to counsellors.
- Your counsellor will keep brief factual notes of the counselling sessions which are not identifiable and will be stored in a secure location. If you do not wish for notes to be kept, please let your counsellor know. These notes will be kept for one year after the completion of the counselling.

### **Counselling Sessions**

- Group Counselling sessions will normally be at weekly intervals. Regular attendance is important if counselling is to be effective.
- There is a time limit of 12 months with regular reviews each term. If the counselling work continues up to this time limit your counsellor will talk with you about the ongoing options.
- If you are unable to attend a session, please give 24 hours' notice.
- If you miss a counselling session without letting your Counsellor know, she/he will contact you to confirm that you will be attending your next session either by email or phone.
- If you miss two sessions within a 6-week period, it will be assumed that you are currently unable to commit to regular counselling and your sessions with us may end, except in the case of unforeseen or medical circumstances - please discuss this with your counsellor if you miss multiple sessions due to reasons outside of your control.
- Your Counsellor will let you know in advance if she/he is unable to attend an agreed session. If an unforeseen situation prevents the counsellor from attending a session you will be notified by Friends of the Family.
- The end of your counselling is a time to review and confirm what has been learned, to express any disappointments and to look forward to the future. Endings are important events in life. It is acknowledged that finishing counselling may bring up memories of other endings in your life that have been difficult or painful. We ask that you complete an evaluation of your time with us at the end as this will help us with our grant and fundraising activities to support the service.

Please sign to indicate that you agree to this contract.

#### **Client's signature:**

*If this form is completed online, acceptable 'signatures' include e-signatures, images, scans, photos or a typed name and email address.*

Print name:

Date:

#### **Counsellor's signature:**

*First name only*

On behalf Friends of the Family Winchester LTD.

Date of First session: