

# NRPSN Code of Conduct

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose of the Code

This Code is a statement of the ethical values and principles that underpin good pastoral support practice and provides guidance about what is expected of members of the network. The Code sets out the basis for safe, effective, and compassionate care by members which will safeguard and promote the health and well-being of those they support.

### 1.2 Applicability of the Code

The Code applies to all network members accredited by the NRPSN.

### 1.3 Scope of the Code

The Code sets out the professional standards of conduct expected of network members towards those whom they support or with whom they work, their volunteer colleagues and the non-religious.

### 1.4 Acknowledgements

The Code has been prepared for the NRPSN and draws on the Code of Conduct for Healthcare Chaplains developed by the UK Board of Healthcare Chaplains.

### 1.5 Definitions

**Spiritual:** Pertaining to the need in a human being for purpose and meaning in any aspect of their life. In the NHS the terms "spiritual care" and "spiritual needs" have specific meanings, referring to all aspects of care beyond those related to the physical condition of the patient.

**Non-Religious Pastoral Carer:** An individual accredited by the NRPSN who is appointed and recognised as part of the pastoral, spiritual and religious care team within a public, charitable, or private institution. His or her job is to seek out and respond to those who are expressing pastoral, spiritual, or religious care needs by providing the appropriate support using a cohesive system of values or beliefs but which does not self-classify as a religious community, or facilitating that support, through contacting, with the patient's permission, the representative of the appropriate religion or belief.

**Belief group:** Any group which has a cohesive system of values or beliefs, but which does not self-classify as a religious community. This includes humanists and the non-religious generally.

**Religious community:** A recognisable group who share an identity, a belief system, and usually undertake religious practices such as prayer, scripture reading, meditation, and communal acts of worship.

**Probity:** refers to the honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness of pastoral support providers in their professional duties and conduct.

## **2 General conduct of volunteers**

As a pastoral support provider, you are accountable for your decisions and conduct and you must be able to justify your practice. In particular, you must:

- work within the rules and procedures of the institutions in which you are offering pastoral support
- promote and safeguard the interests and wellbeing of those you support
- treat those you support with equal respect and dignity
- respect the rights of individuals, belief groups, and religious communities to hold their own values, traditions, beliefs, and practices
- act with integrity, sensitivity and understanding
- develop and maintain your knowledge, skills and capabilities to practise safely, ethically, competently and legally
- ensure that you are fit to practice and that those you support are not at risk of harm because of your conduct, performance or health
- comply with the terms of accreditation by the NRPSN, and the policies and protocols of the institutions in which you work
- maintain your accredited status within the network
- uphold the reputation of NRPSN, the institutions and pastoral support practices in which you work

## **3 Relationships between pastoral support volunteers and those they support**

Pastoral support involves establishing relations and engaging in practices in situations where people are vulnerable and there is an imbalance of power. Pastoral relations can therefore go wrong and they have the potential to be damaging or harmful. You must therefore exercise your role with sensitivity, discernment, and within ethical boundaries. Special care should be taken when relating to children, those with mental health or learning difficulties, and other vulnerable adults. The only appropriate relationship between you and those you support is a professional relationship committed to promote the welfare and best interests of those you support. Moving the focus away from meeting the particular needs of those you support towards meeting your own needs is unprofessional and an abuse of your role.

### **3.1 Personal and Professional Boundaries**

Boundaries enable the effective functioning of caring and supportive relationships in which pastoral support providers can respond to the needs of those they support. Boundaries frame behaviour and practice so that pastoral relationships are consistent and their limitations clear to all parties involved. In particular, you must:

- observe personal and professional boundaries in your practice that sustain the integrity and rights of those you support

- recognise and work within your personal and professional limits and where necessary refer to a colleague or another professional
- **not** behave in ways which exploit, manipulate, intimidate, or which cause distress, pain, or harm
- **not** impose your values, beliefs, or practices on those you support, nor fail to respect their right to hold any beliefs, values, or interests
- **not** display sexualised behaviour towards those you support
- **not** misuse a person's assets or money while having legitimate access to them

### **3.2 Maintaining Trust**

The opportunity to provide pastoral support is both a privilege and a responsibility and you must only practice in ways that enable trust and safeguard ethical relations with those you support. In particular, you must:

- ensure that none of your actions or omissions could be detrimental to the wellbeing of those you support
- maintain clear professional and personal boundaries in the relations you establish with those you support
- involve those you support in decisions about the support and care you provide and facilitate
- respect the autonomy of those you support, including their freedom to make decisions contrary to your beliefs, practices or advice
- avoid any conflicts of interest, but in the event that you have to withdraw your involvement on the grounds of conscience, belief or ethical principles, refer to a colleague or another professional to enable the continued provision of support.

### **3.3 Respecting Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is an expression of trust that enables people to talk about personal and private concerns relevant to their health and wellbeing. Pastoral support cannot be provided without access to and the use of personal and confidential information. You must therefore respect and promote confidence, and in particular you must:

- respect the right of individuals to control access to their own personal information and to limit its disclosure
- establish the boundaries of confidentiality with those you support and respect as far as possible the limitations of disclosure that an individual can reasonably expect or request
- treat information about those you support as confidential and use it only for the purposes for which it was given
- guard against breaches of confidentiality at all times by protecting information from improper disclosure
- ensure that confidential information is not disclosed to a third party unless there is a clear justification which may include: (1) the valid consent of the individual; (2) where there is a risk of serious harm; (3) the prevention, detection or prosecution of a serious crime; (4) and when required by an order of a court or other public body that has jurisdiction
- discuss with those you support reasons why disclosing confidential information to chaplains or members of the institution community may be in their best interests and enable good care
- only disclose confidential information about those you support who are not capable of consent (for example because they are unconscious) on the grounds of necessity if it is clearly in the individual's interest and the disclosure is not contrary to the individual's known values and beliefs

- anonymise personal information to protect the identity of individuals when discussing cases in supervision or peer support

### **3.4 The use of touch and physical contact**

Touch is a basic human gesture and conveys to many people reassurance, care, and concern and it can be a valuable expression of a supportive and caring relationship. However, touch is not value-free; touch is conditioned by social and cultural norms and it can convey powerful signal. Therefore, touch may be perceived as threatening or manipulative, it could be physically painful, and it can be a form of abuse. Hands also carry microorganisms that can be transmitted through touch and may cause harm to those susceptible to infection.

*NOTE: In the prison environment touch is not permitted at all. Furthermore, if any member of staff sees a pastoral support provider touch a prisoner they are expected to submit a Security Information Report recording this event. You could find yourself subject to investigation and possibly found guilty of breaching prison security regulations.*

In other environments pastoral support providers may use touch informally as a gesture of care. However, because the use of touch can be misunderstood or misinterpreted, or it may be unwanted, it must always be used with sensitivity and where there is any doubt permission should be obtained. Where an individual does not have the capacity to consent a volunteer may act on the grounds of necessity if it is clearly in the individual's interest and it is not contrary to the individual's known values and beliefs or in the case of a minor lacking capacity, is not contrary to the wishes of someone with parental responsibility. Physical contact must be stopped if there are signs of discomfort or at the person's request.

## **4 Working with colleagues**

### **4.1 Institutional colleagues**

Pastoral support involves providers working effectively with chaplains, institution professionals, volunteers, ministers of religion, representatives of religious communities or belief groups, and community representatives. In particular, you must:

- respect the skills, contributions, and integrity of colleagues
- work in a collaborative and cooperative manner with colleagues and multidisciplinary teams and communicate effectively with them within the limits of confidentiality
- ensure that you make arrangements for those you support requiring continuing support and care at the end of your shift or commencement of leave
- work within professional protocols and boundaries of confidentiality when receiving or initiating referrals and liaising with colleagues outside your employing institution
- challenge colleagues whom you have reason to consider have behaved unethically and be prepared to bring your concerns to those to whom they are accountable.

### **4.2 NRPSN colleagues**

The success of the non-religious pastoral support network depends on the willingness of individual members to deliver on their responsibilities to their colleagues in the network. In particular, you should:

- be supportive and respectful of colleagues at all times
- work cooperatively and fairly, including in the assignment of lead roles in any given institution
- share experience (while preserving confidentiality)
- foster a collegiate and professional culture
- maintain the good reputation of the NRPSN at all times

## **5 Probity in professional practice**

The role of pastoral support provider requires the highest standards of moral integrity and honesty. In particular, you must:

- be honest and accurate in representing your professional affiliations, qualifications, and experience, and do not make unjustifiable claims about your competence
- distinguish between pastoral support and formal counselling and ensure that those you support understand the type of support you are offering
- refrain from encouraging those you support to give, lend or bequeath money or gifts which will be of a direct or indirect benefit, or put pressure on those you support to make donations
- manage any finances for which you are responsible with diligence and for the purpose for which they are intended
- declare any conflicts of interest that may compromise your impartiality or the interests of those you support
- demonstrate honesty and objectivity when providing references for colleagues or completing and signing forms. You must take reasonable steps to verify any statement before you sign a document, and you must not write or sign documents that are false or misleading

## **6 Responsibility to oneself**

Members must be fully and actively aware of their responsibilities to themselves. In particular you should:

- keep up-to-date and informed about current pastoral support practice and requirements
- engage in Continuous Professional Development (CPD)
- exercise the right to refuse work from an institution, politely and professionally, making referral to another member of the network wherever possible
- maintain a manageable work/life balance, keeping yourself refreshed and making sensible decisions about whether or not to carry on working when ill health or life's circumstances are constraining
- ensure that colleagues in the institution are informed about absences for holidays, sickness etc.
- In areas of risk such as prisons have regard to your own personal safety by making sure that someone else – colleague or other professional – knows exactly where you are going when you leave to provide pastoral support

## **Dealing with misconduct**

Misconduct is conduct that contravenes the standards of behaviour required of pastoral support providers by the NRPSN and set out in this Code. Misconduct should not be confused with capability issues, which are a clear failure by a member to meet an adequate standard of practice through lack of knowledge, ability or consistent poor performance.

Cases of misconduct are most likely to be observed by members of the institution community with whom you are working, and may be subject to the institution's own procedures. Cases which are referred to the NRPSN will be handled through the **Complaints Procedure**. In the event that you believe a complaint may be made you should advise the Director of Humanist Care.

## **Support and Supervision**

In line with most caring professions the pastoral support carer should be provided with support from his/her peers, from the NRPSN. In addition, it is common for professionals in similar roles such as counselling, therapy, or coaching, to have access to supervision. In this context a supervisor is someone with greater experience and competency who supports the provider by reviewing any issues arising from the cases he/she is dealing with (usually anonymised) and helping him/her to learn from the experience. Note that this role has no other supervisory function such as management or administration.

The NRPSN offers monthly drop in supervision sessions with a professional Non-Religious Pastoral Carer. We encourage all members to take advantage of this opportunity in order to develop their practice.

## **Activity reporting**

It is important that the NRPSN has an overview of pastoral support activity being carried out by members. It needs to understand which institutions are being supported, which geographical areas are being covered. It does not want to introduce bureaucracy of any sort that does not serve a useful purpose.

In order for the NRPSN to gain relevant information and evaluate its activities, all members will be required to respond to the annual members survey each November. The survey will allow the network to see, which institutions have been engaged with and help identify key areas for development.

## **Continuing Professional Development**

The network exists to support and promote the work of its members. As members of the NRPSN, we are committed to working with others and to make the most of our opportunities and experiences. We have a shared responsibility to strive for the highest quality in our work. When we become pastoral support providers, there is an implicit commitment to do far more than simply rely on our initial training. We should aim to keep ourselves fresh and appropriately stretched.

The induction training course we organise for new members, through which they first gain experience, learn about pastoral support work and develop their skills before acquiring accreditation should be considered 'initial training'. Once accredited, every member in the network is expected to continue their professional development by taking opportunities for further learning or for working with colleagues to review and improve their practice. This process, which includes many different kinds of activity, should be considered 'CPD'. CPD topics might include "counselling-type" skills, dealing with suffering and loss, and existential issues. CPD can (and will) include some training courses or workshops that all volunteers can attend. A small fee for these may be charged to cover costs but most CPD provided by Humanists UK will be free to NRPSN members. However, CPD should not be limited to attending courses. CPD can involve other activities, many of which involve very little cost, if any. Any activity that refreshes, extends and improves the quality of what we do and offer should be seen as CPD. CPD activities can include any, some or all of the following:

- Training offered by institutions
- Peer (or reciprocated) supervision
- Supporting colleagues
- Observing and being observed by colleagues
- Relevant reading
- Attending any conferences or local meetings
- Attending regional / local workshops
- Attending or running courses – local or national
- Participating in discussion or debates (e.g. at local humanist groups)
- Mentoring a trainee or a colleague
- Solving a particular problem

The NRPSN is not prescriptive about the minimum acceptable amount of CPD any member undertakes. Some organisations require members to comply with a set number of hours, or with formal requirements to attend certain courses, but that would be inappropriate for pastoral support members. Rather, the intention is to encourage all members to motivate themselves and local colleagues and to make arrangements which best suit them and to attend to the areas they consider need particular 'refreshment' or improvement. There is an expectation that all members will consider their professional development and refreshment as a constant personal goal. It is also expected that members will help contribute to other colleagues' learning and CPD, by participating in group discussions, mentoring, observing, or on formal courses.

