



Non-Negotiables

Guidelines for Board, Staff, Interns and Volunteers

The primary expectation of all Elbert County Coalition for Outreach (ECCO) volunteers, staff, and board members is a willingness to take responsibility for their own responses and reactions to any given situation and to engage in a process that is ongoing and open to learning and feedback. The following “Non-Negotiables” are intended to help clarify the philosophical goals of the agency and serve as the baseline criteria from which we assess level appropriateness for working within the agency.

1. We share a basic understanding
 - poverty is systemic;
 - oppression in any form (racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, ageism, etc.) is not acceptable.
2. We continuously work to recognize and challenge our own personal beliefs. This requires
 - an ongoing process of becoming aware of our own prejudices and privileges;
 - constant effort made toward avoiding projection of personal beliefs about a person’s circumstances, or assuming that we know what is best for that person;
 - the responsibility to be aware of our judgments when others disagree or hold different beliefs from our own.
 - a willingness to share personal ideas, and to receive feedback and challenges on these ideas;
 - the responsibility to challenge oppression and privilege in others and ourselves.
 - Full accountability for our words and actions.
3. We have a commitment to ethical communication in all of our interpersonal encounters. It is our goal to support each other in this process.
4. We value and are committed to social change through activism and community organizing.
5. We challenge and avoid the use of blaming, disrespectful, or violent language in our daily lives.
6. We strive to ensure that our actions, with clients, each other, and the community at-large are consistent with our stated beliefs.

In summary, the Non-Negotiables reflect a process that occurs on a continuum. There is no finish-line or ‘final destination’ in following these guidelines. Instead, we recognize the fluidity of learning and change. There are few role models for the implementation of these and similar philosophical goals. We are committed to participating in the process reflected in these “Non-Negotiables” to the best of our ability.

Code of Ethics

Employees, interns, and volunteers in a human services agency such as ECCO have access to a great deal of personal information. They are expected to demonstrate a high degree of responsibility about the confidentiality of this information and how it may be shared. They are also expected to perform their duties in a professional manner. The Code of Ethics seeks to clarify the expectations for conduct of employees, interns, and volunteers as they work with clients, their fellow employees, and the general public. The Code applies to all employees, interns, and volunteers.

I. Relationships with Clients/Boundaries

- A. Our primary responsibility is to serve the best interest of the clients of ECCO. This means carrying out our duties in a professional, concerned, and caring manner. It also requires a degree of objectivity separate from personal feelings so that difficult judgments can be made about the best interests of the client.

Standards of conduct include:

- 1. No employee, intern, or volunteer shall use relationships with clients for personal advantage.
 - 2. There shall be no discrimination expressed, either through actions or words, on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, military status, marital status, political belief, or mental or physical handicap.
 - 3. Personal friendships with clients are a delicate matter, for they may give the appearance of preferential treatment. Personal relationships should be avoided as being detrimental to the best interests of the client. Sexual relationships between clients and employees, interns, or volunteers are unethical and will not be tolerated.
- B. Employees, interns, and volunteers should remember that our aim is to make our clients self-reliant. Furnishing information to the clients so they may act is better than doing it for them.

II. Confidentiality of Information

- A. In a social service agency such as ECCO, special care must be given to the information acquired about clients during the course of professional service. The following guidelines apply:
 - 1. Personal information about clients is available only for the routine uses for which it was collected by persons authorized to handle the data; therefore, any information about clients (including their names) should never be shared with anyone outside the agency without completing an ECCO Release of Information form.
 - 2. In the course of professional assessment by supervisors pertinent information about clients may be shared. This should be confined to the issue being discussed.
 - 3. In cases of reporting "critical incidents" to supervisors, information regarding the client may be revealed as it applies to the situation. Supervisors may on occasion need to report information to the authorities, which again should be done with great care to avoid prejudicing any actions taken by the authorities.
- B. Information about either clients or employees should not be revealed over the phone or to visitors without the written consent of the person involved. This includes inquiry about employment verification, residency, personal information, etc. In cases of emergency, every effort must be made to notify the person that information is needed.
- C. As a unique human services agency, ECCO must necessarily examine periodically, in an ongoing mode, the effectiveness of its program. Such scholarship and research should be guided by the conventions of scholarly inquiry and should respect the confidentiality of clients.

II. Relationship with Agency

- A. Employees, interns, and volunteers need to keep in mind the financial interests of the agency as a non-profit organization. Resources and materials of ECCO must not be wasted, and must be used only for the purposes intended.
- B. Those employees, interns, and volunteers doing business with suppliers will not execute or imply contracts which might result in benefit to himself/herself or the employee's family or personal friends.

- C. Employees and volunteers shall protect ECCO against failure-to-report liability (as well as protecting themselves against civil or criminal liability) by promptly reporting their supervisor any knowledge of illegal activities (including suspected child abuse or neglect).

Know Your Own Boundaries

Don't share your personal life with the client. You may listen to them, but do not become their "friend".

Don't meet with clients outside of the agency. Don't plan to do favors by calling or taking them places. This will set up a very unhealthy dynamic.

The client may want to "bad mouth" a staff person or another client to you. Please do not allow that. They are only trying to get you to side with them and split the staff or alienate another client. Always tell clients that they need to talk directly to the person they are having a problem with, and let your supervisor know any concerns you may have about what a client may want to tell you.

Don't ever share client information with another client. This is only to be shared with staff.

Keep confidentiality by making sure a client doesn't hear information that is not for them to hear.

Never let anyone outside the agency know the name of a client who is coming to us for services.

Never bring gifts to a client or accept personal gifts from a client.

Don't ever "share secrets" with a client. If they ask if you can keep a secret, tell them no. You are considered part of the staff and staff shares information about what is going on while a client is receiving services.

You are never to discipline a client's child. Get the parent to take care of the situation.

If you have questions or concerns about a staff member or another volunteer, ask your supervisor to clarify.

If you see a client in the community, do not approach them as this could lead others to believe they are clients of the agency.

Ethical Communications

GO INWARD and take responsibility for your own reactions and personal growth.

Make a COMMITMENT to yourself, the other person, and the group, that you will reach a resolution to the conflict. This is different than wanting to prove you are right. You might want to discuss what "resolution" would look like for each of you.

Go DIRECTLY to the SOURCE of your concerns. This eliminates gossip, group fragmentation, and putting people in the middle of a situation that has nothing to do with them.

Use "I" STATEMENTS, CLEAR LANGUAGE, and as many SPECIFIC EXAMPLES as possible. This might require some time to first determine what the key issues are.

BE PREPARED to take the TIME to work through it. If resolution is not attained in the first meeting, then make a commitment to ongoing discussion.

Let yourself be CHALLENGED by new ideas! CONSTRUCTIVE criticism is ethical. Debate and disagreement can be healthy. It might not always feel comfortable, but as long as it's done in the spirit of respect, it is an opportunity for you to GROW! (and it can be done gently too!)

Keep the GOAL of Ethical Communication in mind: resolvable conflict and unity. Reaching resolution creates power and cohesion in a group committed to social change!

After Reviewing this Agreement

The process of thoroughly reviewing this agreement may take some time. The employee, intern, and volunteer and her/his supervisor should identify the areas and questions that pose the most difficulty and concern, and develop a satisfactory plan to address them. This is intended to be a thorough, thoughtful, challenging, and respectful process. Feedback and comments are welcome and, in fact, necessary in order to make changes that might enhance the effectiveness of the process.

By signing below, you are verifying that you have read and understood this Commitment Agreement, and have addressed any questions or concerns you may have with the policy of ECCO.

Name

Date

Witness

Date

Signature

Date