

Professional and Ethical Guidelines For HCH Outreach Workers

"Ethics is how we behave when we decide we belong together. "
David Steindl-Rast

The overriding philosophy of these guidelines is to treat others as you would want to be treated. This applies not only to interactions with clients, but with co-workers, supervisors, staff from other agencies, policy-makers, etc. At the very least, do no harm. It is expected that outreach workers will consistently treat others in a respectful manner and provide competent and compassionate care to clients in whatever forms that care may take.

It is prudent for workers to anticipate and identify ethical dilemmas that arise in outreach and to discuss these issues with supervisors and peers. Some of the guidelines below are intended to prompt such discussions with hopes that adherence to the HCH philosophy of care and practice within proper boundaries will result. These guidelines are to serve as an adjunct to agency-specific codes of ethics and other relevant policies.

- Commit yourself to being well prepared physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually for doing this work.
- Develop an awareness of the causes, experience, patterns and politics of homelessness.
- Continually increase your knowledge about homelessness-related health conditions and care, including social service needs and resources.
- Present yourself in a genuine, hospitable manner.
- Maintain a perspective of objectivity with clients. Avoid being judgmental.
- Be respectful of others' desire for privacy and need to keep secrets. Be assertive but not intrusive in your outreach.
- Maintain confidentiality in your relationships.
- Keep your word. Be trustworthy and reliable.
- Respect people as ends, not means. Never exploit clients for personal or agency gain.

- Educate others about behaviors that can enhance their health and well being. Also, inform them of behaviors that might cause them to be susceptible to disease and/or bring harm to themselves or others.
- Don't attempt to intervene in areas in which you are not trained or competent.
- Do not withhold information from clients about other resources and services from which they could benefit.
- Devote some part of your time, no matter how little, to use your knowledge and experience to inform public planning and policy-making processes.
- Refrain from imposing your moral or religious beliefs on others.
- Refrain from having social or emotional relationships with clients outside of work.
- Do not use your own home to shelter clients.
- Never engage in sexual activity with clients.
- Do not accept cash from clients. Accept gifts only when it is culturally appropriate.
- Refrain from giving personal gifts or cash to clients.
- With the possible exception of pepper spray, never carry weapons.
- Never use alcohol or illicit drugs on the job.
- Develop practices of self-care and renewal within and outside the work setting.

(Adapted from the California Association of Community Health Outreach Workers' Code of Ethics and various other sources)