

Protecting Client Confidentiality

Homemakers can provide measures to protect confidentiality anywhere, whether in an office, clinic, institution, or in the field.

Any situation. In any situation there are important measures that all Homemakers can take to protect client confidentiality:

- Confirm the client's identity at the first encounter
- Never discuss the client's case with anyone without the client's permission (including family and friends during off-duty hours)
- Never leave hard copies of forms or records where unauthorized persons may access them
- Use only secure routes to send client information (for example, official mail) and always mark this information confidential

When in an office, clinic, or institution. Great care should be taken to protect client confidentiality in health care settings and in the field.

- Conduct client interviews in private rooms or areas
- Never discuss cases or use clients' names in a public area
- If a staff member or health care worker requests client information, establish his or her authority to do so before disclosing anything

When in the field. In the course of locating a client, workers may need to ask for clients by name or inquire about a client's work location and habits. This should be done as discreetly as possible. Before giving out client information to anyone, Homemakers should ask themselves, "Does this person need to know?" Homemakers do need to identify themselves as having a legitimate reason to seek a particular individual, but there is no need to disclose the nature of the problem or any specific details of the case in question. When a disclosure occurs during the course of a field investigation, it is a good idea to document what information was given out and to whom it was given, in case there are any follow-up questions from the client or the person who was informed of the client's health problem.

In the client's home, Homemakers should allow the client to determine who is present during care. Family members or friends should be present and participate in the care only if the client specifically requests this. In the field there are important measures that can be taken to protect client confidentiality:

- Be discreet when making client visits
- Conduct client care in private; never discuss the case in a public place
- Don't leave sensitive or confidential information in messages for the client on a door; but if a message must be left on the door, it should be left in a sealed envelope, marked confidential, and addressed to a specific person
- Don't leave sensitive or confidential information on an answering machine that other people can access
- Don't leave sensitive or confidential information with a neighbor or friend, and be careful not to disclose the client's condition when gathering information on his or her whereabouts

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

Study Questions

List the ways in which a client's confidentiality can be protected in

- Any situation
- An office, clinic, or institution
- The field

Case Study

Rolando is a Homemaker at a busy client home. It is the end of a very busy Friday afternoon. He is trying to wrap things up and go home after his extremely stressful week. He is going through the client-related papers and forms he has been working on that day. He is on his way to put the papers and forms in the mail when he is interrupted by a phone call from his babysitter. His babysitter explains that she has to leave early that day. Thinking it is an emergency, Rolando hastily hands over the papers to one of the client's family members, Sam. He asks Sam to put the papers in the mail. Before getting a reply from Sam, he leaves. Sam was not very happy because he was not planning on going to the post office. He ends up leaving the files on the table, an area where family and friends may see the files.

- What measures should Rolando have taken to protect client confidentiality?

Case Study

Another Homemaker, Janice, has been trying to contact her client Jerry for several days. She has visited his home several times, and tried to call him on the telephone. One time when she visits Jerry's house she sees Jerry's neighbor. The neighbor tells Janice that Jerry just left. Janice introduces herself to Jerry's neighbor and explains that she is from the Homemaker Agency is looking for Jerry. She tells the neighbor that the reason she is looking for Jerry is that he has TB and has missed taking treatment for over 1 week. She also tells the neighbor that if she sees Jerry to please tell him that she has stopped by to see him. Finally, she leaves a message for Jerry on the door of his apartment. She does not have any envelopes for her letter, but decides Jerry must really get her message and so she tapes it to his front door.

- Did Janice do anything that possibly threatens Jerry's confidentiality? What measures should she have taken to protect client confidentiality?

Homemakers, review the information listed in this study module, answer the questions above (use another sheet of paper if you need more room), then return the "Study Question" page and answers to:

Billy Davis, RN
Integrated Resources
PO Box 2
Maben, WV 25870