

SAVING GRACE: Imagine Life Without Violence

Ethical Commitments and Codes of Conduct

Introduction

SAVING GRACE is a private non-profit providing comprehensive family-violence and sexual-assault services while promoting the value of living life free from violence. SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers are often faced with situations that require making ethical decisions. The intent of this document is to clarify ethical standards for present and future SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers and to act as a guide for their conduct.

Moral Principles

SAVING GRACE espouses moral principles that are valuable in ethical decision-making and are the basis for the ethical commitments that follow. Reviewing these moral principles will help to clarify conflicting issues involved in a given situation so that the most ethical action is taken in response. SAVING GRACE's moral principles include:

- 1) The victim ¹ has a right to **self-determination and autonomy**. The victim controls her/his own life and has a right to be free to choose her/his own actions. When a victim is considering leaving an abusive situation, for example, SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers do not advise, moralize, warn, lecture or give other "solution" – type messages that preempt the victim's ability to problem-solve.
- 2) SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers will act with **benevolence**. Staff and volunteers will not intentionally cause harm or take actions that risk causing harm. When feasible, staff and volunteers will prevent harm from being done. It is the responsibility of the SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers to ensure "safety for all" (above privileges for one), as well as to maintain an environment where differences are honored and any kind of violence is not allowed.
- 3) SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers will be of **service** to clients without expecting anything in return from clients. Staff and volunteers do not expect to get their personal needs met within the staff and volunteer-client relationship. For example, a client may return to an abusive situation or may not express gratitude for SAVING GRACE services. In these and other instances,

staff and volunteers frequently will not have "closure" or know the outcome of a victim's situation. Yet, to be of service is to continue to give aid, and meet one's personal needs elsewhere.

- 4) All people coming to us have a right to be treated fairly and reasonably, in other words, with **justice**. This is not to say staff and volunteers should treat all people the same, because not all people are the same. However, if a person must be treated differently, the staff or volunteer needs to have a rationale that explains the necessity and appropriateness of treating them differently.
- 5) SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers act with **integrity**. Staff and volunteers are trustworthy and act in a manner consistent with SAVING GRACE's high standards of conduct. This includes speaking truthfully, not stealing and not using intoxicants.
- 6) Everyone has a right to be treated with **dignity**. Staff and volunteers treat others in a respectful and caring fashion, not gossiping or speaking harshly, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity.

Ethical Commitments

In addition to embracing the moral principles outlined above, SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers commit to act ethically as follows:

- 1) **Confidentiality** is the most critical of all of SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers' commitments. Confidentiality is not simply respecting a person's right to privacy; it is a safety mechanism for clients and staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers may forego confidentiality when disclosure is required to prevent clear and imminent danger to the client or others, or when legal requirements demand information be revealed. When SAVING GRACE's services are first sought by the client – and in all subsequent aspects of the staff and volunteer-client relationship – staff and volunteers inform clients of the limitations of confidentiality and identify foreseeable situations in which confidentiality might be breached.
- 2) Staff and volunteers commit to **professional development** to continually improve their skills and knowledge pertaining to SAVING GRACE's scope of work. Staff and volunteers also commit to increasing self-knowledge in particular, as it fosters a healthy and effective helping relationship. SAVING GRACE will take reasonable steps to provide or arrange for

¹ For the purpose of this document, the term *victim* is used when referring to a person who is determined to be the person who needs protection, whether that person is a woman, child or man. The term *batterer* is used when it is determined that the person has systematically used tactics to manipulate, intimidate, coerce and threaten.

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continuing staff and volunteers development in these areas.

- 3) Staff and volunteers execute their duties within their **boundaries of competence** based upon their qualifications, training and related professional experience. When a client misunderstands the staff member or volunteer's competency – asking for legal advice, for example – it is the staff member or volunteer's responsibility to correct that misunderstanding (as well as not give legal advice).
- 4) **Physical contact** is to be avoided between the staff and volunteers and the client. Prior to coming to SAVING GRACE, victims may have experienced situations where their personal boundaries were not respected. Victims may be more susceptible to boundary violations by and against the staff and volunteers. Batterers often have difficulty with boundaries - 'blowing past' them, so it is best to avoid any contact.
- 5) Staff and volunteers also avoid **dual relationships** with clients. Staff and volunteers are cognizant of their influential positions with respect to clients, and they avoid the potential for harm present in dual relationships by referring to another staff member or volunteer when necessary.
- 6) Staff and volunteers seek **supervision** to help sort out confusing or conflicting emotions that arise after working with a victim or batterer. Co-workers, managers or an expert outside the organization can fill this role. Providing services for victims and perpetrators of violence is traumatic, difficult, and complex and takes work to gain a clear perspective. When staff and volunteers feel they have lost compassion, balance or calm, that is the time to seek supervision. SAVING GRACE will take reasonable steps to provide or arrange for supervision of staff and volunteers.
- 7) Staff and volunteers will use **accurate and respectful language** in all communications to and about the clients we serve. Staff and volunteers will not use derogatory language in verbal or written communications with or about clients.
- 8) Power imbalances exist. Denial of power imbalances is a set-up for the abuse of power. Therefore staff and volunteers pay **attention to power differentials**. There is always a power differential in a staff -client or volunteer-client relationship. For example, the staff and volunteers have resources the client needs. Staff and

volunteers commit to remain aware of their use of power and the impact of that power on the client.

- 9) **Sexual activities** between staff and clients are never engaged in under any circumstances, whether such activities are consensual or not. Staff members should not engage in sexual activities with a former recipient of SAVING GRACE services, because that would create a dual relationship and potentially impair the advocate's professional judgment.
- 10) When working with batterers, staff and volunteers avoid **collusion**. The goal is to create a 'process of change' that expects accountability. Remember that the possibility for offense remains high, while liking the offender at the same time.
- 11) SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers have a **responsibility to their colleagues**. This multifaceted ethic includes treating co-workers with respect, modeling conflict-resolution behavior, and avoiding negative criticism toward or about co-workers. It also includes the commitment that, when a volunteer or staff member believes a co-worker has acted inconsistently with SAVING GRACE's codes of conduct, she/he should seek resolution by discussing her/his concerns with the colleague (when feasible) prior to taking action through managerial channels.
- 12) SAVING GRACE staff and volunteers have a **responsibility for self-care**. Staff and volunteers embrace self-care with the same seriousness, energy and passion that they dedicate to advocacy. Self-care is critical for maintaining a compassionate and balanced state-of-mind, preventing the effects of vicarious traumatization, and working productively and helpfully with clients. SAVING GRACE will take appropriate steps to provide organizational solutions for self-care as well as arrange for individual and professional self-care development.

Acceptance of Codes of Conduct

The acceptance of assignment at SAVING GRACE implies that the staff member or volunteer is willing to maintain the high standards of conduct specified in this document. The greatest possible good can be achieved when the organization and the individual aspire jointly to these standards of conduct.

Signature

Date

6/18/08